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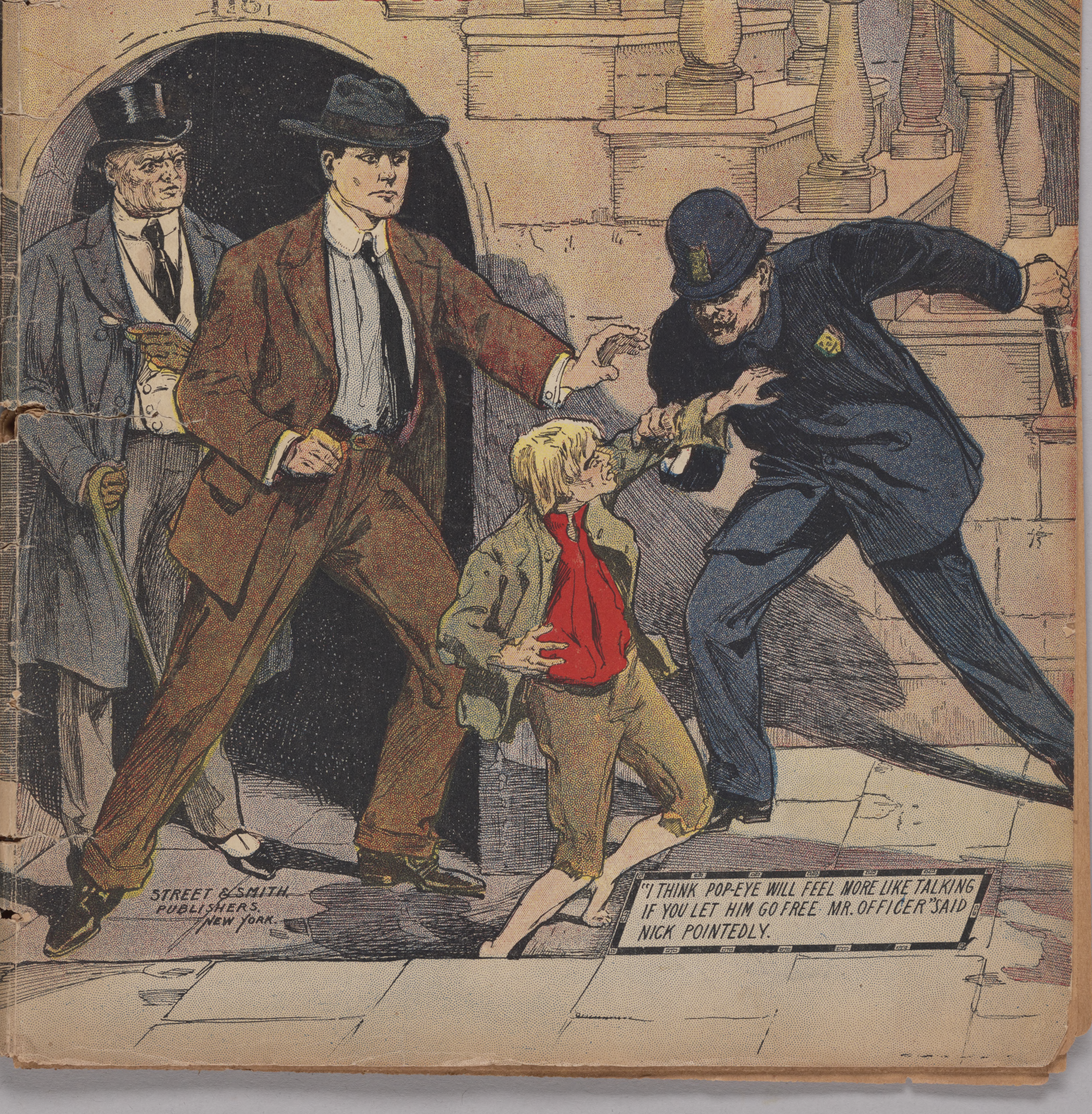
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE BROKEN LATCH



"I THINK POP-EYE WILL FEEL MORE LIKE TALKING IF YOU LET HIM GO FREE, MR. OFFICER," SAID NICK POINTEDLY.

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NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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The Broken Latch;

OR,

Nick Carter's Single Clue.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE GANG FIGHT.

As Nick Carter's big touring car swung out of the roadway of the Brooklyn Bridge at the Manhattan end, somewhere about eleven o'clock one evening, Patsy Garvan, who sat beside the chauffeur, turned to speak to his chief, and to Chick Carter, who jointly occupied the tonneau.

"Joseph won't be expecting us, Mr. Carter, and Adelina is out of town, too. I'm as hungry as a wolf. Shall we stop at Nam Wing's joint? He will give us a good feed."

"Good idea, Patsy," said Chick, before the older man could speak. "I'm a bit hungry myself."

"Have it your own way, boys," agreed Nicholas Carter. "This late-supper habit has the whole of the metropolis by the throat! It is rightly said by the poet of the Great White Way:

"'A knife, and a fork,
A bottle, and a cork—
And that is the way
To spell 'New York'!"

Then on to Nam Wing's chop-suey emporium."

Patsy, who could have found his way about Chinatown with his eyes bandaged, told Danny, the chauffeur, where to drive, and they were quickly before a little dark house in Pell Street, which had few outward signs of containing a restaurant, saving certain Chinese characters painted on the doorpost, and a lighted paper lantern swinging above the door itself.

Nam Wing's was not a place popularized by the "seeing New York" motor-omnibus parties. Those gaudy places are run solely to attract the ignorant crowd of sightseers. But Nam Wing was a real Chinese cook, and his fellow countrymen—rich merchants and tong leaders—foregathered in the quiet little place on the first floor of the old building, and ate and drank at his tables. It was seldom that whites came here at all; but Patsy was known to the proprietor, and the fat old fellow waddled forward with an unctious smile to greet young Garvan and his two companions as they entered from the street. Danny was left to care for the machine, for, although Chinatown seemed wonderfully quiet that night, it would have been unwise to leave the car alone for a moment.

The ordinary Celestial is usually a most quiet and inoffensive person, and even in their tong feuds they do not interfere with white people; but because opium and other drugs are easily obtained from illicit dealers in the quarter, there gravitate to it some of the worst thugs and most immoral creatures of the New York underworld.

The American saloons which occupy the street corners surrounding Chinatown are, most of them, patronized almost wholly by crooks and other bad characters; some of the political gangs which have sprung up so rankly during the past ten years make their headquarters hereabout, too, and quarrels between members of these gangs frequently cause trouble for "the innocent bystander." Chinatown, at night, unless one strictly has business there, is a part of the city of New York which visitors would better read about than see.

Nicholas Carter, the detective, and his assistants were called upon to familiarize themselves, in the line of duty, with all parts of the town and with all manner of people. But this was entirely a chance visit to Nam Wing's, the party having been down to Manhattan Beach and Brighton just for the run and a breath of salt air. It was midsummer, and the little restaurant would have been unbearably warm had there not been a circulation of air from the buzzing electric fans.

Nick and his party gave their orders to the fat Chinaman, and he waddled back to his kitchen, where they could see him at work over the gas range, preparing the savory dishes. In a moment a younger Chinaman brought the little bowls of hot tea, each covered with its own saucer to keep in the steam and the fragrance of the herb.

"This is as satisfying and as cooling, after all, as the iced concoctions sold in American resorts," Chick was saying, as he sniffed the steam from his particular bowl, when suddenly his chief touched his arm warningly. Chick looked up, to see that Patsy was already giving his attention to that which had caught the chief's keen ear.

The buzz of conversation came from a single table in the rear of the restaurant, where the only other patrons of the place were sitting—three blue-bloused Chinamen. That which had caused Nick Carter to draw the attention of his companions was no sound in the restaurant at all, however.

When they had come into the place the baize door had swung to behind them. The hall had been lighted sufficiently for them to see that it was empty as they passed in from the street. The table the detective and his assistants had chosen was the nearest to the door.

Now, although he had heard no footstep in the hall, or on the steps without, or even on the stairs which led to the second story of the house, Nick knew that there was somebody behind that baize door. And Patsy and Chick, in a moment, were both assured that such was the fact, and they looked at their chief and nodded.

The heavy, quick breathing of some person was audible to all their ears. Then there was the faint sound of buttons scratching on the woodwork. The heavily breathing person was leaning—perhaps because of exhaustion—against the doorpost; it seemed to the listeners as though he were striving to suppress the sobbing breaths which were fairly forced from his lungs.

Nick and his companions glanced at each other curiously, and Patsy, who was nearest the door, was already rising to push it open, when the baize door swung slowly inward and a man stepped into the restaurant. They could not see his face, for Nick's party were behind the door as it opened, and he did not turn their way. He slouched to a table in a farther corner and slumped into a seat. They could see his shoulders heave, and it was evident that he was still drawing those labored breaths which had first attracted their attention to him.

"He's had a hard run—eh?" muttered Chick.

"It would seem so," admitted Nick Carter, still eying the back of the man curiously. "Do you know him, Patsy?"

"Nix. I'll ask old Wing when he comes along. Perhaps he knows him."

The strange man was rather roughly dressed, and he wore a soiled red handkerchief tied loosely around his throat, instead of a collar and tie. His hat was a derby, and he did not remove it. There was a soiled newspaper lying on the table before him, and he picked it up, opened it with hands that shook so that the paper rustled, and appeared to be deeply engrossed in the sheet while waiting for some attention from Nam Wing or the waiter.

Both of those worthies seemed to be busy at the moment, and the newcomer was left alone. He assumed an air of great indifference, as though he had carelessly entered the restaurant for a bite of supper, with no other object in his mind; but the fact that he had been running and was almost on the point of dropping with exhaustion was too obvious to be mistaken by the detective and his friends.

"Maybe he's made a touch somewhere and is getting away with it," suggested Patsy, in a whisper. "I'd like to see his mug."

Before either of his companions could reply, there was a sudden rush of footsteps in the street, and a voice shouted:

"In there!"

Behind the keen sound of this single speech was a background of rough voices; the street seemed to have suddenly filled with excited people.

Heavy boots sounded on the wooden steps and in the hall; the baize door was flung back till it banged sharply against Patsy's chair, and a head was thrust into the room.

It was that of a man with a red muffler of cotton about his neck, and out of this red rag his long throat craned like that of a bird of prey. He was a threatening-looking scoundrel, and he pushed his head around the edge of the door slyly and blinked down at Nick Carter and his friends with little evil green eyes.

For a moment he leered at them, and then looked sharply around the entire restaurant. The Chinamen at the farther table were intent upon this newcomer, too, and the young Chinaman who helped old Nam Wing uttered a squawk and disappeared somewhere beyond the kitchen.

The bird of prey gave brief attention to the Celestials. His vision swept the room and finally found the huddled figure of the single man in the corner. He uttered a grunt of satisfaction and disappeared like a flash, letting the door swing to.

He was not alone in the hall outside the restaurant door; Nick and his companions were sure of that, for they overheard several fiercely whispered words in more than one voice. Patsy sprang to his feet.

"Say!" he exclaimed, in a low voice to his friends, "it's our move! There's going to be something doing here in a minute."

"Who is he?" queried Chick, meaning the long-necked fellow who had peered into the room.

"'Buzzard' Aisle; he's one of the Red Necks. They haven't any business over here in Chinatown. It spells trouble, for the Kid Twist Gang and the Red Necks are on the outs."*

Patsy drew his own chair away from the door and back against the wall as he spoke, and Chick followed suit as a matter of precaution. Only Nick Carter did not move. He sat where he could see the stranger at the farther table, and that stranger was then moving.

He must have heard the noise outside and knew that somebody was at the door. As though unwillingly, yet moving slowly and steadily, he twisted his head until his side-face could be seen from where Nick and his assistants sat.

He was a smooth-faced chap, browned by the sun; but there was a strange pallor under this bronze, and his lips were colorless. It was evident that he was even now panting for breath.

His clawlike hand beat a tattoo on the table and the paper fluttered to the floor. He turned far enough for his countenance to be well distinguished from the doorway.

The baize door was a narrow crack open—just as though a foot had been thrust against it, so that those outside might look at the stranger. Nick and his companions heard two words hissed by a voice without:

"It's him!"

The detective leaped up, pushed aside the table, and took one stride toward the door; but he was too late to interfere.

Through the narrow opening there was spit a stream of fire, and five pistol shots cracked in such rapid succession that they seemed like one deafening report!

The assassin's aim was perfect. The man at the table uttered no sound, but his body crumpled up under the hail of lead and he sprawled his arms across the table.

Seconds only elapsed from Nick's leaping up to his collision with the door. He went through it like a whirlwind; but those in the hall had scattered like rats disturbed in a granary.

The gaslight in the hall had been turned out, and the flame in the paper lantern above the door had been quenched, too. The hall was full of pungent powder smoke, and the echo of flying feet was all Nick caught of the villains.

He came back into the restaurant and joined his assistants in hurrying to the dead man at the table. The Chinamen all kept back, silent and afraid. They recognized that the killing had been "gang work"; they respected and feared it, as they respected and feared the vengeance of their own tongs.

"A pretty thing, this, to happen in a civilized community!" grumbled Nick Carter. "New York certainly is criminal-ridden when a shooting like this can be pulled off so boldly."

He bent over the dead man and peered into his quiet face.

CHAPTER II.

THE JADE GOD.

There may have been horror and fright expressed in the face of the victim of this terrible assassination at the moment when he was shot; but it is a fact that, while those that die by the sword, or by knife thrust, show the agony of the wound in convulsed features after death, the victim of the bullet usually displays a peaceful countenance.

It was so in this case. The dead man's face was calm and peaceful.

He was not an ill-looking man, and he was young. He was deeply bronzed, as Nick Carter had noted before, and his glazing eyes had been blue. There was a reckless cast to his features, but he was not unhandsome.

"Do you know him?" asked Nick of Patsy.

"Never set eyes on him before," admitted the young Irishman. "If he belongs to one of these gangs, he's a new one on me. Great heavens! how they did pepper him!"

"It was one gun did it all—an automatic five-shot revolver," remarked Nick succinctly.

"Think that wretch who looked into the place was the guilty party?" queried Chick.

"'The Buzzard?' Never!" returned Patsy. "He never was caught with a gun yet, and I suppose the police have 'frisked' him a hundred times. He's a mutt—a sneak—a stool pigeon. I don't know what this row was about, but you can bet the Buzzard wasn't a principal in it. He looked in here to size up the crowd before the fellow who did the business got to work."

"I presume Patsy has it right," said Nick quietly.

"Who do you suppose he is?" asked Chick.

Nick had already run his hand into the inner pockets of the man's coat and vest. "Seems to be without papers," he said. "No watch, or other valuables in that line."

"What's this?" asked Patsy suddenly, from the other side.

He was feeling of a hard lump in the side pocket of the dead man's coat, between his thumb and forefinger, and as he spoke he dove into the pocket with his other hand and drew the object out.

"Hello!" ejaculated Chick. "That's a curious object." And he stared at it, as did Nick and Patsy.

It was a little carved jade god, sitting cross-legged, and as ugly as a Billikin. As a curio it might have brought a fair price; but its intrinsic value was not great.

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*This was before the notorious Kid Twist was shot.

"Made in the East somewhere, eh?" suggested Chick.

"Or over in New Jersey," scoffed Patsy.

Nick took the little god in his hand and examined it rather closely. "I should say it was genuine. Indian workmanship, no doubt," he observed.

"This fellow is no Hindoo," declared Chick.

"No. An American, I should say," returned Nick. "And a Westerner. Ah! here are our friends from Mulberry Bend."

Two burly policemen entered the restaurant as Nick spoke. One was a lieutenant, and he said promptly to the man with him:

"Go to the chink's back door, Casey, and stay there till you're relieved—though these houses have as many exits as a rabbit burrow. Now, then, Nam Wing! what about this?" he called to the shaking old Chinaman.

Nam Wing waddled forward. The other Chinese sat silently at their table like so many mummies!

"Who did this shooting?" demanded the police lieutenant. "He's dead, isn't he, gentlemen?" he added, turning to Nick and his companions, whom he did not know.

"Very much so," said Chick.

"You three saw it?"

"We did," admitted Nick.

"I'll have to detain you for the present. Sorry," said the lieutenant briefly. "Now, Wing!"

"Me know nothin' 'bout it," declared the old Chinaman gloomily. "That felley, him come lunnin' in here—sit down—lead paper; 'nother man, all-samee come to door—shoot pop! pop! pop! Him dead," said Nam, expressively spreading abroad his hands.

Meanwhile, the police officer had come nearer and was examining the dead man.

"Why! he's no chink," he exclaimed, in surprise. "He's a white man. The Buzzard told me it was a chink shooting."

Nick and his friends glanced at each other, but said nothing. It was evident that the disreputable character, Buzzard Aisle, had helped his friends to make their getaway by throwing the police lieutenant off the track in the first instance. But Nick signaled his assistants to say nothing.

"I took the liberty to examine his pockets," said Nick quietly, to the officer.

"That was a liberty, mister," returned the policeman sharply. "What did you find?"

"Nothing but this." And he put the little jade god in the officer's hand.

"Hello! What kind of a game is this? Maybe this poor chap is some kind of a dago. Were they fighting over the possession of this thing? Is it valuable?"

"As a charm, or antique, it may have some value," said Nick quietly. "But there was no fight—at least, not here. This victim of the assassination came running to this door. We heard him waiting outside the door to get his breath and compose himself. Then he came in and sat down here, with his back to the door, evidently hoping he had escaped his pursuers. The man who shot him remained in the hall and fired through the crack of the door, when it was held open no more than a few inches. Five shots were fired—from a magazine gun. I think you will find all five of the bullets hit him."

"Thanks! You're an observant man," said the lieutenant of police, without any idea who he was complimenting. "Either of you other gents notice anything? You didn't see the man who did the shooting?"

"There was a man looked in the door before the shooting occurred," said Chick, getting his tip from his chief.

"What did he look like?"

Chick exactly described The Buzzard.

"Why, that scoundrel!" ejaculated the officer. "Buzzard Aisle said it was a chink shooting. He knew all about it, I bet! I'll have him on the gridiron for that, all right! Come, gentlemen, you'll have to step around to headquarters with me. And I want you, Nam Wing."

The old Chinaman expostulated vigorously, but to no purpose. The lieutenant was obstinate; it was as much as he would do to let the three Chinese patrons of the restaurant shuffle out into the street. Finally Nam fished the boy who helped him out from under the kitchen table, to which refuge he had darted when trouble first broke out, and gave him strict injunctions in Chinese to take care of the place.

"Our car is outside; we can all go around in that," said Nick.

"All right, sir. I noticed it as I came in. Young fellow driving it that I've seen before somewhere. Intelligent chap, he looks. I'll sound him going over as to what he saw when the shooting was under way."

So, when the party reached the street and pushed through the almost frantic crowd which congested the block, the lieutenant, after leaving an understrapper on guard to wait for the surgeon, stepped in beside Danny.

"You are under this gentleman's directions, Danny," said Nick pointedly, and the chauffeur allowed himself to be pumped thoroughly while the car crept around into Mulberry Street, and to the big old building with the green lights in front.

Danny had not seen the victim of the outrage enter the house. This fact pointed to the supposition that he must have entered it by some rear way.

But he had later noticed the man called The Buzzard lead several others—whose faces Danny did not see—to the door of the building. The Buzzard entered first, and then the others went in.

In a minute or two the shots were fired; but nobody but The Buzzard came out of the street exit of the building. Danny would have grabbed him, but he saw Nick in the doorway and believed that nothing had happened to his party.

"Did you see the lights put out in the hall?" asked Nick, giving the lieutenant a pointer.

"Ah! I didn't notice that," said the policeman quickly. "You are an observant man, sir."

Patsy choked down a laugh by a fit of coughing.

"I saw the lights put out—yes, sir," said Danny.

"Who by?"

"A Chinaman."

"Hello!" said the lieutenant, again. "Then there was a chink in it. When was the light put out—before The Buzzard and his gang entered, or afterward?"

"Just afterward, and previous to the shooting."

"I'll find out about that chink," muttered the lieutenant. "Here we are, gentlemen; you'll have to see the captain."

Nick pushed ahead when they were ushered into the office of the man then in charge of the detective bureau, whom he knew very well, and gave him "the high sign." Seeing that Nick did not wish his identity revealed, the captain smiled, nodded, and asked for the particulars of the case brusquely.

When he was assured by Nick that he and his friends had told their full story—all they had seen of the gang fight and murder in the Chinese restaurant—he told them they could go.

"Of course, you may be called upon later to testify in court proceedings," this official said. "By the way, you don't attach any importance to that thing, do you?" And the captain tossed the little jade god upon his desk again.

"Not unless there proves to be some mystery about the dead man or his identity," Nick replied. "It is an odd trinket—particularly odd for a man of his kind to carry. He may have stolen it; or it may connect him with some deeper mystery. I'd keep my eye on that jade god if I were you, captain."

As Nick and his party filed out of the office, the captain caught sight of the expression on his lieutenant's face, and he burst into laughter.

"Didn't know who you had netted that time, eh, Bill?" he observed.

"And I don't tumble now," grunted the other.

"That was Mr. Nicholas Carter, my boy. You surely have heard of him?"

"What!" gasped the lieutenant. Then a deep expression of disgust made its appearance on his countenance. "Well!" he grunted. "And I complimented him on being an observing gent. Well!"

CHAPTER III.

A CALL ON "SENTIMENTAL SAMMY."

Joseph, Nick Carter's ever-alert man servant, was on the mat to open the front door for his master, and Patsy, and Chick when the automobile dropped them at Nick's Madison Avenue house. The party had halted for their supper at a Union Square restaurant, and the young men were both ready to turn in at once; but Joseph beckoned Nick aside and put an engraved card into his hand.

"This gentleman has been here twice this evening, Mr. Carter," said Joseph. "He finally left his card, begging you to see him as soon as possible. His address is penciled on the back."

"'Mr. Samuel Perrine,'" quoted Nick, from the card. "Why! that's Sam Perrine, the big soap man, isn't it, Chick? Here's his address: 'Three hundred and twelve and a half Fifth Avenue.' Isn't that the old Perrine house?"

"That's 'Sentimental Sammy,' all right," yawned Chick. "What can he want of you, Nick? Why, you don't even know him, do you?"

"I have never met him. But everybody knows who he is. Fell heir to the great Abbott estate—the property of his mother's family—and keeps on making soap." And Nick chuckled.

"He's a mark at the club," said Chick. "He's not a bad old fellow, withal. But the boys certainly do guy him a bit. I don't suppose he is ever invited to any of the swell doings. He tried to give a dinner himself just after coming into the Abbott property, and going to live in the family homestead; invited a lot of swell folk, I understand. They considered it a piece of impudence on his part, and did not even reply to his notes of invitation. Somebody said the invites were written on the letter heading of the Perrine Soap Company! Ha, ha!

"Well, Sentimental Sammy got his spread all ready—first time there had been such doings in the Abbott house for a decade, I guess. And not a soul he invited came. Think of it! He'd hired an army of servants, and they were whispering in corners, and on the stairs, and making fun of the poor old chap.

"But Sentimental Sammy tumbles to a thing as quick as the next man. He may not have good taste, and he isn't in the swim, of course; but he's made too much money to be called a fool!

"What does he do, when he understands that the society people have given him the 'yoch-yah,' but telephone over to his big soap factory in the gas-house district, and invites the heads of departments and a lot of the old hands over to Fifth Avenue to eat up the swell grub.

"Think of it! he sent autos after them, and about thirty men, in their working clothes, and right from the soap factory, sat down at the table in the Abbott dining room, and they certainly enjoyed that feed. And Sentimental Sammy presided at the head of the board as calm as a June day.

"Pluck, eh? Sure! Sentimental Sammy isn't so soft as they think him. But it was a wonder the Abbott family pictures didn't fall out of their frames.

"That was the last time—the only time, in fact—that Sentimental Sammy tried to entertain. He lives in the big house with his servants, and he got into the club by some fluke, and a few have learned how really worthy the fellow is. Some of those people who insulted him when he tried to give his party are sorry for it now. Some have even been cads enough to borrow money from him. But Sentimental Sammy will never be a society light, Nick."

"I should presume not," rejoined his chief absently. He had been studying the card in his hand, and, as Chick wandered on to his bedroom—Patsy had already gone to his own apartments—the detective nodded to Joseph to follow him upstairs to the big study, or office, where most of Nick's business was transacted.

"You say this Mr. Perrine seemed very anxious to see me, Joseph?" asked Nick.

"Yes, Mr. Carter."

"He has been here twice?"

"Since seven o'clock, sir."

"Humph! He must consider the matter of importance—a man like him—if he came himself and sent no representative."

"He assured me he was Mr. Perrine—a fat, rosy-cheeked man, with light hair."

"I believe that fits Mr. Perrine's description. And he gave no hint of his business?"

"No, Mr. Carter. But his anxiety was painful. He wanted me to be sure and tell you the instant you came in, and begs you to come and see him at once."

"What! to-night? I did not understand *that!*"

"I gave him no assurance that you would call before morning."

"Well?"

"But he said he was willing to be disturbed in the middle of the night, if you could come."

There was a rule of conduct that Nick Carter seldom failed to follow. What could be done to-day he scarcely ever postponed until the morrow. Now he sat down at his table, drew the telephone instrument toward him, and after a glance at the directory called for Mr. Samuel Perrine's house number.

The moment Central rang it there was an answer. In the well-modulated tones of an English servant, the person at the other end of the wire said:

"Is this Mr. Carter?"

"It is," said Nick. "You were expecting a call from me?"

"Mr. Perrine told me to remain beside the phone all night, sir, hif it was necessary. Hi suppose, sir, you are Mr. Nicholas Carter, the criminal detection agent?"

"I am a detective—yes."

"Mr. Perrine has gone to bed, sir; but he told me to beg hof you to come over 'ere at once. It is not a matter that can be explained hofer the wire, sir——"

"You are in Mr. Perrine's confidence?" interposed Nick.

"Hi 'ave the 'onor hof bein' Mr. Perrine's man, sir."

"His valet?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know what the trouble is?"

"Hi do not, sir, saving that it 'as to do with the hold 'ouse on Rutgers Street. Mr. Perrine was down there this hafternoon, and 'e came 'ome greatly disturbed. 'E did not explain to me the nature hof the trouble. But hit is serious, Mr. Carter, hand hif you can come hofer 'ere hat once, 'e will stand hany expense, sir. 'E told me to say that, sir."

"I'll be there in ten minutes," said Nick Carter, with sudden determination, and hung up his receiver.

But he did not start at once n dropping the phone. Instead he crossed the room to the tall cabinet which filled the space between the windows, and pulled out one of the biographical drawers under the caption "P." Running through the cards thus exposed, he halted at several which had the name "Perrine" printed on them. One of these he selected and read through carefully, as follows:

"PERRINE, MARCUS AURELIUS.—Bn. Jan. 2, 1833, d. Apr. 5, '97; will erratic; estate not wholly settled. In trade 30 yrs.; globe trotter, antiquary; lived alone when at home in Perrine house, 16 Rutgers St. Property tied up for 25 yrs., S. Perrine, nephew, administrator."

"Humph! Trouble at the Rutgers Street house, eh? And that hasn't been occupied since the uncle died, I believe. What could have happened there?" muttered Nick, as he prepared for the street again.

It was a brief walk to the house on Fifth Avenue, which had likewise fallen to the ownership of the soap manufacturer because the Abbott family, in the male line, had run out, and Sam Perrine was the only child of his mother.

Nick Carter had heard that both families—the Perrines and the Abbotts—had considered Samuel Perrine the black sheep of the family because, instead of frittering his original little patrimony away, or marrying rich, and trying to be fashionable on next to nothing a year, he had snapped his fingers at society and gone to making soap!

He made pretty good soap, too. His posters, on which flared his family name and so disgusted all the Perrines, stared at one from every billboard. Samuel had worshiped his mother, and had never married. When he branched out and began to make toilet soaps as well as laundry soap he put his mother's pictures on the soap boxes and called it "The Lady Alice."

His mother understood; she knew that he dedicated the best work he could do in the soap-maker's art to her. Had he been an author, he would have devoted his best work to her name.

But the Abbotts were horror-stricken to see the miniature of she who had been the beauty of the family, and had likewise been a great belle in her time, decorating shop windows and the toilet counters of department stores.

If Sam's mother had lived until her brothers had died and *she* had come into possession of the family home on Fifth Avenue, instead of he, society might have opened its doors to the soap manufacturer in time. Sam had money to put the house in repair, and to keep it up; but, after all, money does not *always* pay one's fee into select circles.

In a general way Nick Carter knew these facts, and ran over them in his mind as he walked to the Abbott house. But he had never met the master of the house until the smooth-faced cockney servant, with whom he had talked over the phone, ushered him into an upstairs study that evidently adjoined Mr. Samuel Perrine's bedchamber.

Sentimental Sammy was sitting in a flowered dressing gown in a big chair by his writing table. He was not an unattractive-looking man, but nobody could have honestly called the great soap manufacturer handsome.

Hunched up there in the chair, in the loose robe, with his sleepy, rosy, fat face, he looked more like a comic Cupid than anything else!

He did not have a hair on his round face—not even an incipient mustache sprouted to relieve the baby look of him. His hair was yellow, and was plastered upon his crown with something sticky to hide the fact that the parting was of abnormal width.

And when he spoke it was with a soft, gushing sort of a voice that sounded like a schoolgirl's! It was ridiculous to hear that foolish-sounding voice come from such an obese person, for Mr. Samuel Perrine weighed in the neighborhood of two hundred, while possessing no impressive height.

"Mr. Carter?" squealed the millionaire soap manufacturer. "At last!"

This was rather melodramatic, but Nick refrained from smiling, for he saw that the gentleman was much disturbed and excited. He calmly put his card in front of Mr. Perrine and then took the chair which the valet softly placed for him.

"You may go, Bronson," said Mr. Perrine, but the servant had scarcely closed the door when the gentleman eagerly said: "Mr. Carter! I have the very strangest occurrence to bring to your attention that I have ever heard of myself, and I fancy in your experience you have found few such mysteries."

"That is a broad statement, and, if true, an interesting fact," replied the famous detective. "Let me hear about it."

"In the first place, Mr. Carter, are you acquainted with my personal history?" queried Sentimental Sammy, flushing all over his fat face.

"To some extent. Sufficient for ordinary purposes, Mr. Perrine," said Nick, smiling.

The soap manufacturer looked relieved. "I hate to speak of family matters, Mr. Carter," he admitted. "I have had no happy affiliations with either my father's or my mother's family; and since my dear mother died I have been very unhappy indeed."

The millionaire's eyes actually filled with tears, and he had to wait a moment after speaking of his mother, before he could continue. It was easy to see why he was called "Sentimental Sammy"; Mr. Perrine was not only a tender-hearted man, but he lacked the ability to hide his feelings when they were in the least stirred. He was childishly "soft" in this way, and his acquaintances had given him his nickname in ridicule.

"You perhaps have heard of my uncle, Marcus Aurelius Perrine?" finally asked the millionaire.

"Naturally."

"He was an eccentric man. He made a great deal of money in the foreign export trade. It was considered a more genteel business than the making of soap—though I do not know why," said Mr. Perrine, still sniveling and wiping his eyes, which were round, and of a light-blue color like a China doll's.

"When he had made his money," continued Mr. Perrine," he retired from business. He had a fad. If I had a fad I suppose I would retire from business, too. But I am only interested in soap making, and improving the output of my works, and in advancing the manufacture of the goods that keep the world clean. I don't know, Mr. Carter, but that I am quite as great a philanthropist as some of these other rich men."

"Undoubtedly," admitted Nick, with some warmth.

"But it was of my uncle that I was speaking. You know he owned and always lived in the old Perrine house on Rutgers Street. A ridiculous place for a man to live in New York, for the surroundings are anything but pleasant.

"And he filled that old house—almost every room in it—with all manner of truck that he bought during his travels. Antiques, both genuine and utter fakes, were in his collection, and he spent no less than a hundred thousand dollars for the oddities he picked up and stored in that house. Perhaps you know what he wanted to do with them?"

"I am not sure that I do," said Nick, interested.

"He wanted to give them to the city of New York, and have set aside in the Museum of Art a room for his collection alone. Naturally he could not find any of the authorities willing to advance his wishes and help him to give notoriety to the 'Perrine Collection of Antiques and Horribles,' as one of the smart newspaper writers of that day called it.

"Uncle Marcus was furious, and swore that he believed the people of New York would yet arise in their might and demand the establishment of a museum in which his collection could be exhibited. To that end, and in that belief, he tied up that part of his property, including the Rutgers Street house, for a quarter of a century, and making me accept the care of it all, as I was executor and heir of his other estate.

"Of course there is about as much chance of the city of New York accepting the collection and establishing a museum for it as there is of its buying up a waterfront junkshop and exhibiting the contents of that in a museum.

"But the money value of the stuff, despite the fact that Uncle Marcus was often befooled and faked, is large. It is in my care, and I am held by the courts responsible for the stuff in the Rutgers Street house. I, or my heirs, must satisfy the trust before the courts some thirteen or fourteen years hence. Do you understand?"

"So far, so good," said Nick. "What further?"

"Now, Mr. Carter, when I found that there was no escape from this charge, I had the stuff in the Rutgers Street house inventoried and a catalogue printed. Then I had carpenters, masons, and ironsmiths go there and make the house as safe as a bank; I do not believe that any burglar could break into the house by any ordinary means, and I was so assured by officers from the police headquarters, who went all over the place after I was done.

"There are barred doors and windows at the basement and first floor. The other floors are shuttered with sheet iron, padlocked on the inside. The roof scuttle is a sheet of steel, riveted in place. The chimney flues would not admit a well-grown cat. The coal chutes are hermetically sealed with masonry at the cellar wall.

"It has been my habit, even after these precautions, to visit the house every few weeks and go all over it. I always take a man with me or have a policeman on the beat stand guard at the door while I am inside. To my knowledge, nobody has stepped into the house but myself for ten years, or more, and I was last in it before to-day not three weeks ago.

"Yet, Mr. Carter, despite these facts—which are facts—when I entered that closed house on Rutgers Street this afternoon I discovered that scarcely an article of intrinsic value was to be found there!"

"Robbed?" queried Nick Carter, surprised.

"Cleaned out! More than half the contents of the house removed bodily within three weeks, and nobody seemingly the wiser, nor could I find a door or a window tampered with!" And Mr. Perrine threw himself back in his chair and seemed to be vastly interested in learning how the detective would take this amazing statement.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOUSE IN RUTGERS STREET.

And it was an amazing statement; Nick Carter admitted it instantly. Mr. Samuel Perrine was a man of affairs, a man who had arrived at an eminence he never could have reached had he been in the habit of making mistakes in small things.

He declared his attention to detail in sealing the Rutgers Street house had been exact; Nick, therefore, accepted that statement as correct. For more than ten years—nearer twelve—the house had remained locked and barred as he, as administrator of the Perrine estate, had arranged it.

A hundred cracksmen might have known what was in the old house, or not one might have known. It was all the same. A house thus barred would not be an object of interest, as a usual thing, to bank burglars. The valuables in it were not of the portable nature of gold and silver.

"Why," murmured Nick thoughtfully, "if what you say is true, Mr. Perrine, they must have backed up a truck and taken the stuff away by the cart load!"

"It really would seem so, Mr. Carter," admitted the millionaire, moping his forehead. "Perhaps I should have engaged a caretaker all these years; but I did not see the reason for going to that expense. Nevertheless, that is aside from the point. Three weeks ago, when I was in the house, not one of my uncle's treasured possessions had been touched. The dust lay thick over the rooms. Three times I have had the trouble of going over that house and dusting everything with my own hands. I know most of the antiques and other gewgaws as well as Uncle Marcus did. I tell you, there is scarcely a portable thing of value remaining."

"You don't mean to tell me," said Nick, "that the furniture has been removed?"

"No-o. Not quite so bad as that."

"The furniture remains intact, then?"

"I missed nothing in that line."

"And yet there are some valuable pieces there, I presume?"

"Quite, sir."

"Things that would tempt the cupidity of either a thief or an antiquary?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Now, Mr. Perrine, tell me, as near as you can remember, how large the largest article was that has been removed from the house."

"I should say that a collection of seven Egyptian mummies must have been both the largest and heaviest."

"Whew! They were worth something, I should suppose."

"A drug on the market, Mr. Carter," said the millionaire soap manufacturer, shaking his head.

"You don't tell me!"

"I priced such things years ago, trying to estimate the real value of uncle's collection. Even a Pharaoh would bring scarcely his weight in old iron. Every museum and college in the country is supplied—and as ornaments for suburban front lawns they have not come into fashion."

"Might be stood up for scarecrows in farmers' cornfields," suggested Nick, with an answering smile. "Well! to business: How much did each of those mummies weigh?"

"With the box and all, possibly two hundred pounds," said the gentleman reflectively.

"Make up your mind, then, that more than one person was concerned in the robbery," the detective said.

"But how did one—or two—or a dozen men get into that house?"

"Oh, we'll come to that in time," said Nick calmly. "We have established the fact that one man, unless he were a giant, could not have carried off all the goods stolen. And we can come to a second conclusion pretty easily, too."

"What is that, Mr. Carter?"

"In spite of the fact that more than one man was engaged in the robbery, they did not take valuable articles of furniture which might have sold more easily, and for better prices, than many of the smaller articles. Am I right?"

"Quite so."

"Now, as they carried away heavy bundles such as those mummies would have made, it was not that they left the furniture for fear of being seen making away with such bulky articles. The doors were in what shape, Mr. Perrine?"

"The front door is provided with a grillwork screen, set into the stone, and the door, or gate, in the screen is padlocked and the keyhole of the padlock filled with lead. The chain must be filed in two to release the fastening.

"The rear basement door is fixed in the same way. I enter by the door under the front stoop. This is defended by an iron gate with a spring lock. The heavy oak door behind it cannot be opened without the use of two keys. Here they are. Save when I have use for them, they are locked into my private safe yonder."

Nick glanced quickly at the face of the library safe set into the wall beside the fireplace.

"Who else can get into that safe?" he asked.

"Nobody."

"Not even your valet?"

"Not even Bronson, Mr. Carter. If I died to-morrow, that safe would have to be forced. I carry the combination in my head."

"Never wrote it down?" asked Nick.

"No, sir; and I do not talk in my sleep."

Nick smiled, and went on with his inquisition.

"I infer, then, that you consider it to have been impossible for any person to have abstracted your keys long enough to have duplicates made from them?"

"Quite so, sir."

"Then the robbers made their entrance and exit by some other means than by the doors?"

"How could they have taken the stuff out at the front of the house, anyway? Either day or night they must have been seen. The police always have an eye on the house," said Mr. Perrine.

"The windows?"

"I tell you, Mr. Carter, I could not find a fastening tampered with anywhere about the house."

"The roof scuttle?"

"Was riveted in place as it was when the house was first sealed up, sir."

"We can conclude, anyway," said Nick, "that the robbers did not use the doors because they took away no bulky articles. Their means of exit was by some smaller aperture."

"They could not have taken those mummies through a keyhole," grunted Perrine.

"Very well put," admitted Nick. "We admit all that. But it seems to me, Mr. Perrine, that you have asked me to help you solve a mystery entirely from your statement of the facts. Now, I have gone about as far in deduction as one can easily go in this matter. I want to see the place myself."

"Of course you do!" ejaculated Perrine. "When will you go?"

"My time is at your disposal. It is now," said Nick, consulting his watch, "half after one o'clock. You have spoiled my night's rest, and I would be willing to visit Rutgers Street now as at any time."

"By Jove!" cried Perrine, getting out of his chair in a hurry. "I like promptness. I'll go with you at once. Bronson!"

The valet appeared.

"Telephone for a taxi, and then come and help me get into my street togs," commanded Perrine. "I'll be with you shortly, Mr. Carter," and the millionaire trotted out of the room, and Nick heard him puffingly getting into his clothes in his dressing room.

Nick Carter was much interested and puzzled by the case the millionaire soap manufacturer had put before him, and was glad to postpone sleep for the present in an endeavor to get at the truth of the mystery. Naturally he expected to find that Mr. Perrine had overlooked some ordinary means of entrance to the Rutgers Street house—if not when the house was originally barred, then on the previous afternoon, when he had made his amazing discovery of the robbery.

The detective did not put forth this suspicion, however, during the drive downtown. Rutgers Street, although in the heart of the lower East Side, and surrounded by veritable slums, is not, for its entire length, at least, an unpleasant locality. The old Perrine house was not the only brick residence left standing on the street, and some of its neighbors were occupied by the old families that had built them.

Although the section hereabout is greatly overcrowded by an influx of immigration, the property values have not increased sufficiently to tempt many of the older residents to sell their dwellings. It is the advance of business that increases real estate values, and there are not many great manufactories, or office buildings, being constructed in the locality.

At the time in the morning when Nick and the millionaire drove into the neighborhood, Rutgers Street was as quiet as an uptown thoroughfare. Nick advised halting at the precinct station first and getting a man to go with them and stand guard at the door of the Perrine house, and to this Mr. Perrine agreed. The sergeant at the desk let them have a man on Nick's say-so, and without question. They did not have to report the robbery.

"There is no use in letting the papers get hold of the affair any sooner than necessary," whispered the soap manufacturer. "They will have enough to say about it if it finally comes out," and he sighed.

The cab stopped before the shut-up house, and Nick and the fat millionaire got out, while the officer climbed down from the seat beside the chauffeur. Perrine led the way into the area, and fumbled for his keys.

"Wait a moment; let me look at that lock first," said the detective, and he drew forth his match safe and lit a waxlight.

The little flame showed him that the lock in the grating at the basement door was a Yale spring lock and that it would have been impossible to make an impression of it in wax, nor could it be picked easily, even by an expert locksmith.

When this grating was opened, Nick made examination of both locks of the inner door, too. Not a crumb of wax was to be found around either. In fact, the locks were rusted with disuse, and it was difficult to turn the keys in them. Finally Mr. Perrine opened the door and they entered the musty-smelling hall.

"Remain here, officer," ordered Nick, and they locked the door behind them—he and the millionaire—and left the policeman on the outside.

"Of course, there's no gas turned on," said Mr. Perrine, fumbling along a shelf behind the door in the dark. "I always keep a lamp here."

He soon found and lit it, and by its pale gleam Nick saw the basement hall. It ran through the house from front to rear and Nick requested Mr. Perrine to lead the way to the rear door first.

"We'll take these matters as they come, beginning with this floor," he said.

"You think I may have overlooked some fastening, eh?" sniffed the millionaire.

"I wish to assure myself that the mystery really is a mystery," admitted Nick.

"All right," said Perrine good-naturedly.

The rear basement door was barricaded. A big ice box had been moved into the end of the hall, totally filling the space from wall to wall, and making it impossible for the door to be opened without the article of furniture first being moved.

"Satisfied?" grinned the soap manufacturer.

"Quite. Let us see the rear windows," returned Nick calmly.

The kitchen had two large windows. They were barred on the outside—so Perrine said—like a jail, and inside all that Nick could see was a sheathing of matched boards. He assured himself that this sheathing had not been tampered with. The front basement windows were guarded in the same way. It stood to reason that no break had been made by the basement way.

"Come upstairs," said Perrine, ascending heavily before him. "I fancy you will be astonished a bit there."

And Nick was. On the lower floor there had been no signs of the loot of the house; but in the first room—the back parlor—into which they looked on this street floor, the detective saw plenty of traces of the robbers.

It was plain the mantel, tables, and shelves against the walls, and several cabinets, had been stripped of their contents. There were plenty of newspapers and excelsior about. It did not take much analysis to discover that the robbers had taken their time in packing the goods stolen for safe transportation.

There were half-used balls of twine, wrapping paper, some burlap, and Nick picked up a long upholsterer's needle, evidently used by the robbers in their work.

"Cool fellows, I declare!" he said. "They seemed to be quite sure of being undisturbed, Mr. Perrine."

"Weren't they!"

"And you were in here only three weeks ago?"

"Just so."

"Was it your habit to come often?"

"Sometimes not for two months—even longer."

"No regular time elapsed between your visits?"

"You are right, Mr. Carter."

"Did you often allow only three weeks to elapse between visits?"

"I do not think I ever have looked in here before at such short intervals."

"How came you to do so this time?"

"I left a little pocketknife here the last time I came in. I missed it a good deal; I have carried it for twenty years."

"Yet you allowed three weeks to elapse before coming after it?" demanded the detective shrewdly.

"Why, I have been to Cincinnati, Mr. Carter. Didn't I tell you? I went the day after I was here before, and I only came home again night before last."

"Ah!" cried Nick. "Now we are getting at a point. You were absent for these three weeks?"

"I was."

"Expect to remain that length of time when you went away?"

"Approximately—yes."

"Anybody know about your business?"

"About my absence? How long I was to be gone?"

"Yes."

"Of course. My manager. Bronson. The other servants. My barber at the Astor House. A policeman on this beat. Why—a hundred people may have known it."

"And that you would remain away from the city a specified length of time?"

"Quite so."

"Then the fact that these people took their time, and removed the goods carefully, is explained," said Nick, with a wave of his hand. "Somebody had full knowledge of your movements, Mr. Perrine."

"I suppose so," grumbled the millionaire. "But who?"

Nick refused to be drawn off into a discussion of that point at the moment.

"Come on," he said quietly. "Let us continue the examination of the fastenings of the doors and windows."

Perrine smiled grimly, and led the way to the front of the house. There an enormously tall and heavy hall stand was drawn squarely across the wide front door, just as the ice box barricaded the rear basement door below.

"There! That has stood there since the house was closed. Are you satisfied now, Mr. Carter, that the robbers did not back up a furniture van and bring the stuff out of the house by this door and load it on the truck?"

Nick laughed. "You certainly have an unanswerable argument here," he admitted.

Nevertheless, he examined the fastenings of the windows on the lower floor to assure himself that they were intact. Then he expressed himself as ready to go above.

Wherever they went signs of the marauders were visible. Some statuettes had been broken and thrown in a heap in one room; but Mr. Perrine declared that all the really valuable replicas of famous works of art, and examples of Eastern carving and sculpture, had been taken away.

"Why, Mr. Carter! there were barrels of the stuff in that room alone!" declared the millionaire.

The detective, however, could not be swerved from his close scrutiny of the window fastenings. He went carefully through this floor, and the one above, but found nothing to show that a window shutter had been opened.

The mystery of the method of entrance and exit of the burglars was, indeed, profound. The exit to the roof could not be forced, saving by the use of a cold chisel to cut off the heads of the rivets. If any house had ever been securely sealed, this seemed to be the one!

The architecture was of the heavy, solid variety in vogue seventy-five years ago. The walls were thick, the windows had "seats" instead of the modern narrow sills; everything in the building was of the most solid character.

A huge chimney ran from cellar to roof on the east side of the house; there had been no general heating arrangements—not even a hot-air furnace; but on each floor there had been a huge stove, so Perrine said, so that there were at least half a dozen flues in that chimney.

Nick finally came back to the room on the street floor into which he had first looked—the rear parlor, or drawing-room. A broad archway connected this and the front apartment on the floor; but there was no door.

"Here," said the detective decisively, "the goods were packed for transportation. You can see that yourself, Mr. Perrine. In the upper rooms there is no excelsior scattered about, few papers or string, and no other traces of packing."

"Quite true," admitted the perturbed millionaire.

"Again, in the hall and rooms below, in the basement, I observed no litter. This proves, to my mind, that the stuff was not carried out by the lower way. Something would have been dropped; something scattered. We will have a look at the cellar later; but just now I wish to examine this apartment thoroughly, Mr. Perrine.

"Here is centred our interest. Here the burglars packed their loot, and from this apartment it was carried—how? where? Those questions are in point."

"Nick Carter stepped into the centre of the apartment as he spoke, and, in his familiar and usual way, thoroughly scrutinized the place, and in silence. He was near half an hour in doing this, and his method was one which can scarcely be surpassed if one wishes to thoroughly examine such a room.

He allowed his gaze to move steadily from his very feet, across the faded carpeting of the room, up the wall and across the ceiling to a point directly over his head. He turned slowly on the pivot of his own feet, his gaze following the same course at each slight move.

Thus, when he had finished his scrutiny, not a square inch of the walls, ceiling, and floor of the apartment had been missed, and every object in it had come under the measure of Nick Carter's keen eye.

CHAPTER V.

THE BROKEN LATCH.

The detail Nick gathered during this half hour of close observation footed up, in main importance, as follows:

The room was more than twenty feet broad and thirty long. There were two large windows, locked, with iron shutters on the outside, bolted. There was the door into the hall of the house, and the archway into the front apartment.

The furniture consisted of a large, heavily carved, and ornate black oak table that would have brought three hundred dollars at least in any antique store. There were several oak chairs of the same grade—very massive and unwieldy. The stuffed chairs were covered with striped, faded coverings.

There were several smaller tables, one inlaid with ivory and very beautiful. There was a huge old case for books, or bric-a-brac, along one wall. There were glass doors to this, and they stood wide open, the shelves having been stripped of the articles that had been stacked on them. Mr. Perrine told the detective that this case had contained some of the more valuable small articles in the collection.

There was an ottoman, a map rack, and a spinnet which, if looks went for aught, must have been two hundred years old. There were some pictures left upon the wall, but many had been removed, frames and all, as the faded places on the wall paper showed.

"Whoever stole this stuff used judgment," remarked Perrine. "I wouldn't give ten dollars a dozen for the chromos they left here. I used to give away better with laundry soap twenty years ago!"

"The point is well taken," said Nick. "Some one of this gang of thieves knew what things to take, and what to leave. He is no ordinary crook, believe me!"

"He's a perfect wonder, that's what he is!" cried the millionaire. "And he has left no trace behind him——"

"Plenty of traces," interrupted Nick. "It remains to be seen if any of these traces are clues!"

As has been said, the huge chimney ran up the east wall of the house, and its breadth was entirely in this room. The fireplace was blocked by an ornate fireboard. The mantel was very massive and had set in above it a heavy plate mirror, much scratched and fly-specked.

On either side of the mantelpiece was a paneled door—evidently the entranceway to closets. When Nick had finished his survey of the room he first approached the closet on the right of the fireplace.

"They couldn't hide anything in those closets," said Perrine. "They're too shallow."

"Closets, are they?" said Nick, but nevertheless opening the door of the first one.

As the millionaire said, it was a shallow place—not more than fifteen inches deep. There were a row of dusty shelves with some worthless litter on them.

Nick closed the door. The fastening was an old-fashioned thumb latch, and it worked stiffly because of the many coats of paint that had, in time past, been put upon it.

He crossed to the other side of the fireplace, and put his hand on the latch of that door. The instant he did this he found that there was something wrong with it.

Whereas the other thumb latch had worked stiffly, it lifted the bar without difficulty; but in this case the thumb piece gave easily under pressure and the bar did not move at all. Nick stooped and examined the latch; then he asked Perrine to come nearer with the lamp.

"What's the matter now?" asked the millionaire. "Do you think the thieves are hiding in that closet? It would be a tight fit for one man, let alone several!"

Nick did not explain in words, but after a moment he seized the thumb piece and drew it entirely out of its socket!

"By Jove!" exclaimed Perrine. "I didn't know that was broken. But that might easily be; I never had occasion to open the closet."

Nick stood with the thumb latch in his hand, squinting at its quizzically. When he looked at the rotund millionaire again he smiled.

"When should you say this was broken, Mr. Perrine?" he asked softly.

"Why—before the house came into my care, of course."

"Now, that is odd, too!" said Nick, suddenly putting the latch into his hand. "If you glance at it you will see that it is a recent break. The metal is not even discolored with rust. And, to go deeper, it is not exactly a break. The staff was cut through, you will notice, by a cold chisel, and on the inner side of the door!"

Mr. Perrine started and stared hard at the bit of metal. Then he looked again at the detective with bulging eyes.

"For—for pity's sake!" he finally gasped. "How can that be possible?"

"I put it to you, sir. What do you think?"

"Why, sir, it is as mysterious as the robbery itself. I—I cannot understand it at all. Was somebody shut into that closet and had to cut the latch to get out? And what good would that have done him, anyway?"

"Take first why the latch was broken if somebody wished to escape from the closet. Naturally, we might expect him to have lifted the latch and walked out. But I noted that the latch of the other door worked with great difficulty. It was very stiff. It might have been an impossibility to have lifted the latch from the inner side of the door. On this side we have the thumb piece to help us—see?"

"I see," murmured the other vaguely.

"So," continued Nick, with confidence, "the latch was cut in two and this piece pushed out upon the floor. Something else was thrust through in its place that gave a better leverage, and the bar of the latch so forced up. The broken thumb piece was thrust back into the hole to fool the observer."

"But," cried Mr. Perrine wildly, "for Heaven's sake tell me how the person who did this got into the closet?"

"An important question. Let us investigate," said Nick calmly, and with some little difficulty he forced up the latch bar, and the closet door swung creakingly open.

There was a difference in this closet from the other which was instantly noticeable. There were no shelves in it.

Its apparent depth, however, was the same—some fifteen inches. The inside walls of both closets were of narrow matched pine, very dark with age. Nick knocked gently on all three walls, and found the same semi-hollow sound resulting. The first closet examined gave forth the same sound when the walls were tapped.

"There seems to be nothing behind those boards, Mr. Carter," said Perrine at last.

"Or, rather, there appears to really be something behind them," said Nick, smiling. "It does not seem that there is a hollow passage of any size in this chimney. The closets are equidistant from the edges of the fireboard. Let us take the board out, and see what lies behind it."

"Soot, and a great deal of dust, most likely, Mr. Carter," sniffed the millionaire.

Nick said nothing until he had forced out the broad board. The lamp showed a cavern of blackness, and sounding the brick with such means as Nick had at hand revealed nothing. So he replaced the fireboard.

"You are holding me in suspense," complained Mr. Perrine. "How do you account for the broken latch? Do you really believe somebody was shut into the closet?"

"The latch was certainly cut from the inside," said Nick firmly.

"But—how did the man who cut it get in there?" cried the millionaire.

"Your question reminds me of the old story of the ground squirrel. Somebody asked how the little fellow dug his burrow without leaving any dirt around the mouth of it, and the reply was—he began at the other end! How he got to the other end is another question.

"The fact is plain, I believe, that the latch was broken from the inside. Whether the burglars quarreled, and shut one of their number into that narrow closet, and he broke his way out again, are matters which must stand over for the present.

"How they got into the house, and how they carried the stuff out of it without arousing suspicion, are the first matters to come up for discussion, I believe."

"Well, *how?*" cried Perrine.

"There is still an important field for scrutiny which we have not touched upon," said Nick promptly.

"Where is that?" demanded the other doubtfully.

"The cellar."

"I tell you the coal-chute entrances are walled up."

"Have you examined them?"

"Well—er—not yesterday," admitted the millionaire.

"Three weeks ago when you were here?"

"Yes."

"We will take a look down there," said Nick, with a smile.

"But you say yourself that these thieves have left no traces in the basement hall, or on the stairs. They must have removed the goods directly from this floor."

"So it appears. But we seem to find no exit from this floor. All traces may have been removed from the lower part of the house for some purpose. Come, Mr. Perrine, show me the cellar."

"I don't believe the explanation lies in that direction," grumbled Perrine obstinately.

"Be open minded, sir," advised Nick, chuckling. "You can never tell in this world what is going to happen in the next. Lead the way, sir."

The fleshy Perrine went heavily down the stairs, carrying the flaring hand lamp, while the detective followed, allowing nothing of the slightest importance to escape him by the way.

CHAPTER VI.

"POP-EYE."

A musty smell rose from the cellar when Mr. Perrine opened the door and held the lamp so that it shone down the narrow flight of stairs.

"I tell you what," said Nick Carter thoughtfully, "it would have given those fellows some trouble to take the mummies down this stairway, at least. There's a nasty turn here."

"Quite right," admitted Perrine.

As though in answer to their voices, there was a rustle and a bump in the cellar—a sudden scampering, and shrill squeakings in the distance.

"Rats only," said Nick quietly, as the millionaire looked startled.

"I suppose so. Shall we go down?"

"Of course. I tell you, sir, we should find something to help us down here."

But it was not immediately apparent that there was anything to discover in the underground rooms. Perrine showed him first of all the two walled-up holes in the front of the cellar through which coal had originally been dumped into the bins.

The thieves had certainly not made their entrance by these means. The cellar was rather damp, and little had been left in it when the house had come into Mr. Samuel Perrine's hands as executor of his uncle's eccentric will. The collection of antiquities, good, bad, and indifferent, were stored in the rooms above.

And Nick certainly was surprised when he found nothing at all in the cellar which betrayed the presence of the thieves who had stripped the house. It was one of the most astonishing mysteries in his whole career, but he refrained from betraying much of this emotion to Perrine. There were no papers or excelsior lying about, and the dust, which lay thick on the cement floor, and which, with the dampness, indeed made a sort of sticky mud, showed no impression of footprints but their own!

Although he quickly came to the conclusion that the thieves had not been in the cellar, Nick Carter's scrutiny of the place was thorough. He paced it from end to end; he looked into every bin and storeroom; and finally he began to sound the walls.

Perrine lost patience and demanded to know how much longer he was going to "remain down in this hole."

"Haste in a matter of this kind leads to mistakes," said the detective calmly.

"You don't expect to find closets in the cellar walls big enough to hide all that truck in?" cried Perrine. "I tell you a couple of van loads, at least, have been removed from the house."

"And how?" returned Nick. "We must find a means of egress, Mr. Perrine. Those thieves entered and escaped by some practicable means, and I must admit to you that, thus far, I have no idea how."

"They didn't go through the keyhole," grunted the millionaire, wagging his head.

Nick finally reached the east wall of the building, and there a thick mass of masonry, like a buttress, jutted into the cellar.

"What's in here?" he demanded, rapping on the stones.

"Why, that's the base of the chimney," said the millionaire testily.

"It's an enormous one," muttered the detective. "Whoever built this house originally wasted a lot of money in mason's work."

"They built houses to stand in those days, young man!" returned his companion sharply.

The base of the chimney was surely solid—no deception there. Nick finished his examination of the cellar with this pile of masonry, and announced himself ready to go upstairs again.

"And what have you learned?" demanded Perrine.

"That your house is very well built," replied Nick, laughing.

"Come, sir! I expect a more illuminating answer than that," declared Mr. Perrine.

"Mr. Perrine," said the detective gravely, "I believe I am a hard man to beat. If I have had any success in life—and success in my chosen career—it has been the result of that attribute of character. Merely because no illuminating discovery has yet been made, I am not failing in spirit. We'll keep on.

"The search of the house has revealed to me several things—and we'll discuss them later. It has not, I admit, shown us how the thieves entered and escaped with their booty.

"Therefore, it is my intention to go at the inquiry from another angle. Instead of working from inside the house, out—as our Dutch friends would say—I propose to leave the house for the present and see what can be learned in the neighborhood regarding the happenings hereabout during these last three weeks—since you went away, sir."

"And meanwhile the thieves are getting farther and farther away with the goods," grumbled Perrine.

"Quite so. But have you any better thing to suggest? Or would you prefer putting the inquiry into other hands?"

"I declare, Mr. Carter! you must not mind me," said the millionaire, with a sudden gush of feeling. "I really do not mean to ask—nor do I expect—the impossible. I am very much disturbed and anxious, however. I leave the inquiry to you, however; you shall have a free hand for a reasonable length of time, at least."

"Thank you," said Nick quietly. "You shall have the very best service I—and my young men—can render. By the way, sir; there is just one question I would like to ask you."

"Go ahead."

"Had you noticed at any time in your uncle's collection of curios a little jade god, of Eastern carving—a god sitting cross-legged like a tailor, and as ugly as a gargoyle?"

"By Jove! Mr. Carter! When did *you* see my uncle's collection?" demanded Perrine quickly.

"I have not seen it—to my knowledge. But I want my question answered."

"He had such a thing—yes, sir. And I remember where it sat in the back parlor upstairs."

"It is not there now?"

"I certainly have not observed it. Those fellows would probably take a thing of that kind. It was valuable."

"So I supposed. I will be frank with you, Mr. Perrine. There was a man shot to death in a gang row over in Chinatown last evening, and in his possession was just such a jade god as you remember seeing here in your uncle's collection. Of course, there are undoubtedly plenty of such curios in the world; but this is a coincidence that will, I believe, bear investigation. Now let us go on," continued Nick. "As I say, our next move is to beat the neighborhood and see what game we can stir up."

The fat millionaire led the way briskly out of the cellar. He was more agreeable at once, when he saw the detective in action.

They closed the cellar door and went to the front of the basement. When Mr. Perrine had unlocked the double doors under the front stoop of the house they found themselves the spectators of a little drama being enacted by the policeman they had left on guard and one other character.

Rather, they were in time for the climax of the drama. As Perrine opened the oak door and they could see out into the dimly lit areaway through the barred outer portal, a shrinking little figure sprang up from the darkest corner of the place and started for the steps to the sidewalk.

It was the figure of a hatless boy. Indeed, he lacked almost every whole garment that decency and the law demands! The opening of the door had startled him out of his corner; but ere he could escape up the steps the burly form of the policeman Nick had left on guard appeared at the head of the short flight.

"Now, there, kid! I've got you!" ejaculated the officer. "Come! we'll see who you are, and learn what you want here. I've had my eye on you more than once lately."

"Ar-r, chee! lemme erlone! I ain't doin' nuttin'!" cried the boy, trying to dodge the big policeman.

"Well, we'll find out what yer doin' that for!" declared the officer.

He had seized the boy's arm, for his ragged clothing would not have detained him for a moment. Now he brought him down the steps to face Nick Carter and the millionaire as they came out of the house.

"This kid has been dodgin' about here for a week and more," the cop explained. "Anything wrong in the house, Mr. Perrine? Mebbe he's a lookout for burglars."

"I ain't nothin' but a kid earnin' me livin'!" sniveled the lad. "I was sleepin' on that straw there," and he pointed to the corner of the areaway. Nick went to the place and scratched a waxlight, revealing some old bedding that had been flung into the corner.

"I reckon the boy *was* samping here," said the detective mildly. "Let's have a look at him, officer."

Still clinging to the thin arm of the waif, the policeman turned his face up with his other hand, holding the sharp chin as though it were in a vise. Nick heard Sentimental Sammy utter an involuntary "tut, tut!"—and, really, the boy was a pitiful little scarecrow.

But his appearance, after all, was not that which might arouse general compassion. There wasn't an attractive feature about the boy.

His face was sharp from ill nourishment, it is true; but there was a sullen look in it that did not impress the beholder favorably. He looked up now sideways at Nick and the fleshy millionaire like a stray dog that has been used to, and expects, blows instead of kindness.

And homely! there was not a bit of color in the thin face; a gray and dirty pallor claimed it all, as though it were not blood, but ditch water, that ran in the boy's veins. His nose was sharp and his forehead bulged almost as though his head was deformed.

But the principal features of his face were his eyes. Such another pair of eyes Nick Carter had never seen. They were as prominent and staring as those of a codfish. They protruded in an uncanny manner, and when their owner rolled them it really looked as though they would fall out of his head!

"What a looking child!" gasped Mr. Perrine.

"They call him Pop-eye around these corners," said the policeman gruffly. "And I shouldn't be surprised if he was up to mischief."

"No, I ain't!" whined the boy, writhing in the official grasp.

"Hold on," said Nick. "We won't accuse him till we know more about him. See here, Pop-eye—if that's your name——"

"That's as good as any," said the lad sullenly.

"But you have another?"

"I dunno. I forget."

"Where do you live?" asked Nick kindly.

"Ain't I been tellin' youse? I sleep here. It's warm enough, and no other kid has found it. I warn't doin' no harm, boss."

"We accuse you of no harm," said Nick. "But you might give us some information."

"Huh?"

"You'll be paid for it."

"I ain't afraid you'll pay me more'n I'll take," said the boy doubtfully. "Wotchu wanter know?"

"How long you been sleeping here in this areaway?"

"The cop's told yer," said the boy ungratefully.

"He was not very clear. Suppose you tell me when you first came here to sleep?"

"Wotchu wanter do? Yer tryin' ter git me stung for sumpin'—heh?" and the boy eyed the detective doubtfully.

Nick pulled out half a dollar and offered it to the gamin.

"That is yours, sonny, for answering the questions I am going to ask you. If your answers are helpful I may have use for you further at even better pay. You look like an observant boy."

"He couldn't help seein' things with them goggle eyes of his," grunted the cop.

"In the first place, I think Pop-eye will feel more like talking if you let him go free, Mr. Officer," said Nick pointedly. "Now my boy, I am not trying to get you into any difficulty. I want nothing from you but information, and not a word you tell me shall be used to your personal harm."

Pop-eye was watching him closely, and, in spite of the inveterate suspicion which saturated the waif's nature, he was plainly inclined to put some trust in Nick's assurances.

"Well, watchu wanter know?" he asked in his sullen way.

"You heard my question. How long have you been hanging about this house? When did you first come here?"

"I been sleepin' here mebbe a month. Almost ev'ry night. One or two nights the rain driv me out."

"Where did you come from when you came here?"

"Aw, say! wouldn't I be a fool ter tell youse that? Then youse'd send me back to de institution."

"What institution?" asked Nick quickly.

"If I told youse, youse'd know—heh?" returned the boy disrespectfully. "Youse ain't goin' to pump me, mister."

"That was certainly curiosity that prompted the question, sonny," laughed Nick. "I will keep off the grass. But about your sleeping here. Have you noticed any men hanging about the house? Ever see anybody go in at night?"

"Naw! An' only de cops hang about here an' chase me," declared Pop-eye, with an angry look at the policeman, and rubbing his arm.

"You would have seen any men paying particular attention to this house, I suppose?" asked Nick quietly.

"There ain't nothin' I don't see!" exclaimed the boy rather crossly. "I kin see all about me. An' I needn't have let this cop ketch me ternight. I waited till youse gents went inter the house, and the cop speaks to the cabman, an' they both goes around the corner. I t'ought they was goin' for a drink up to Murphy's dump; but it seems the bull was onter me, and when I sneaked in here he was watchin'."

"And now will you answer my question, please?" said Nick, without displaying vexation, but sticking to the point so that the boy could not get away from it.

"Huh?" said Pop-eye, eying him sideways again.

"Have you seen any men that you know to be crooks hanging about this house?"

"Nope."

"Any men at all showing interest in the house?"

At that Pop-eye's promptness left him. He rubbed one bare foot back and forth upon the flagstone and hung his head. Nick had to repeat the question before getting another word out of him.

"I dunno wotchu mean," he finally said. "A guy did speak to me one mornin' when I was comin' up out o' here. He grabbed me like this cop done, an' he shook me pretty near out o' me clo'es——"

"Not a hard job at that!" murmured Mr. Perrine under his breath.

"If youse don't like the looks of me clo'es, youse kin give me some new ones," said Pop-eye sharply. "I'll take 'em fast enough if they's offered me."

"Done!" exclaimed Mr. Perrine. "I'll see you have a new outfit in addition to what Mr. Carter gives you for your information."

This promise seemed to warm up the waif a bit more. He began to have some faith in his new acquaintances.

"Mebbe youse gents is all ter the good," said he. "Now about this guy what grabbed me. It was nigh a week ago. He comes on me like he had been layin' for me, an' I t'ought he was a cop at foist. But it seems he wasn't, and I didn't make out what he was—then."

"What did he say to you?" asked Nick.

"I wouldn't wanter tell youse," said Pop-eye, grinning suddenly. "It was the hottest kind of langwidge. An' I t'ought he'd break me neck. But I told him I wasn't doin' no harm down here."

"Did he say what business it was of his?"

"He says he's hired to look out for the empty houses around here."

"A special officer?" asked Nick quickly.

"Mebbe. I seen him again yesterday."

"Here again?"

"Nope. He was round on Jefferson Street. Some guys was movin' stuff out of a house there. I s'pose he'd have charge of that house, now it's empty, too."

"That would be the Ratigan house," interposed the policeman. "I see a truck there yesterday myself."

"What kind of a looking man is this you speak of, Pop-eye?" asked Nick.

"He's a little man in a brown suit, with greasy hair and a black mustache. Looks like some kind of a foreigner. I never seen him only them two times."

Nick looked questioningly at the officer, who shook his head.

"It gits past me," said that worthy. "I never noticed him hanging around."

"Well, what else did you see?" queried the detective, turning to Pop-eye again.

"Where?"

"Here, or hereabout. Did you see anybody else show interest in this house?"

"Nope."

"Ever hear any noises in it at night?"

"Chee! No," declared Pop-eye, wagging his head.

Mr. Perrine here pulled at the detective's sleeve and whispered in his ear.

"What's that?" queried Nick, somewhat startled.

The millionaire repeated his statement as follows:

"There was a house belonging to my uncle's estate on Jefferson Street. I sold it as executor ten years and more ago—and to a man named Ratigan."

"What was the number?" said Nick quickly.

Perrine told him.

"Pop-eye," said the detective to the gamin, "will you go around into Jefferson Street and point out the house to me where you saw the man yesterday?"

"Where they was movin' the stuff out?"

"Yes."

"Sure I will."

"Do you want me any more, sir?" asked the officer. "Here comes me rounds. I'll have to report this."

"I'll speak to the roundsman myself, officer," said Nick quickly.

Mr. Perrine interfered for a moment. "What good is there of my remaining here longer with you, Mr. Carter? You evidently are going to investigate this thing for the rest of the night—and I want my bed."

"I'll excuse you on one condition, sir," said Nick quickly.

"What's that?"

"Lend me your keys to this house. I may want to go into it again."

"All right," said Perrine, but with some doubt in his tone. "You'll be careful?"

"Want to lock your barn after the horse has been stolen, eh?" chuckled Nick.

"I suppose it seems like that. Here are the keys. And about this poor child," added Mr. Perrine, looking commiseratingly at the ragged urchin. "He must have some decent clothes. Will—will you attend to it, Mr. Carter?"

"If he serves me faithfully I will," promised the detective.

"You can expend twenty dollars on my account," said the millionaire quickly. "Poor child! I don't suppose there's any way of doing him any lasting good."

"Ar-r, chee!" murmured the object of Sentimental Sammy's compassion. "Twenty plunks on clo'es? I'll be de hottest t'ing on Grand Street."

"I'll see that he is properly attired, and that he has some capital left out of the twenty to start him in business, Mr. Perrine," said the detective, smiling.

"And—and I'll send him some soap," exclaimed Sentimental Sammy. "He is so dirty!"

He waddled up the area steps and around the corner to the waiting taxicab, while Nick stopped to speak to the roundsman, who now came up, Pop-eye sticking close to his side.

When Nick had introduced himself the roundsman was willing to accept his simple explanation that the trouble in the old Perrine house—if there was trouble at all—might be a matter for private investigation, and that the police need not take cognizance of it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RATIGAN HOUSE.

Pop-eye had been "all ears," instead of all eyes, during Nick's conference with the roundsman. He learned who Nick was, and the fact that his new acquaintance was a detective, and a famous criminal investigator at that, was sufficient to inspire the gamin with an amount of respect and veneration for Nick that few other discoveries would have done.

As they walked away from the Rutgers Street house together Nick found the boy staring at him until he certainly thought the goggle eyes would drop out upon the street.

"What do you do about the streets all day, my lad?" the detective asked.

"Earnin' me livin'. An' it ain't easy," said Pop-eye sullenly.

"What particular trade do you follow?"

"Now yer guying me. I ain't got no trade. I dunno how ter do anything but sweep out dumps—an' de barkeeps wanter pay me in beer an' free lunch. De beer makes me sick," said Pop-eye.

"Is that the best you can do?"

"Ar-r, chee! who'd give me a job of woik?" and Pop-eye spread his hands abroad and looked down at the rags fluttering about his thin body.

"I suppose you might find some difficulty in getting a steady position. But Mr. Perrine's kindness will overcome that; and perhaps I may be able to find you a job."

"D'ye mean it?" demanded the gamin, looking up at him in his sullen, suspicious way.

"Certainly."

"Folks us'ally jollies me," said the lad simply. "I ain't believin' much dat I can't put me hooks onter."

Somehow there was a pathos in this that went straight to Nick Carter's heart. It was good of Sentimental Sammy to invest twenty dollars for the betterment of the physical boy; but Pop-eye needed something besides better clothing.

"You give me your confidence, and you won't be sorry," said the detective warmly. "I reckon you can help me, Pop-eye, and if you do it, I'll show you that I know how to be grateful."

"Yer pretty white, I guess," said the boy, in return. "Wotchu want me to do?"

"I'll tell you after you have shown me the Ratigan house."

"The house them guys was takin' the stuff out of?"

"Yes. By the way, did you notice what kind of goods they were handling?"

"Barr'ls an' boxes mostly."

"And were they ordinary truckmen who were doing the work?"

"It was Tony Polaro and his wagon. He has an office in a cellar on Cherry Street. His wife runs the coal and wood biz and Tony does carting. I helped her one day, but she couldn't talk no 'Merican, an' I dunno dago talk, so it was all off then."

"And who seemed to be bossing the job?" asked Nick.

"Of movin'?"

"Yes."

"Tony was bossin' it."

"But weren't the people who owned the stuff there?"

"There warn't nobody there but us kids and the man with the greasy hair I was tellin' you about."

"Was he bossing the removal of the goods?"

"He didn't seem to be, mister. I reckoned he was lookin' after that empty house, too."

"So the Ratigan house is not generally occupied?"

"There ain't no more folks lives in it than there is in that one around on Rutgers Street," declared Pop-eye. "There it is now."

The house that was once a part of Marcus A. Perrine's estate was situated just about where Nick expected to find it. From his cursory view he believed it to be almost directly behind the old Perrine house on the other street.

"There is a way of communication between the two. What it may be remains to be found," muttered Nick. "The thieves brought the stuff to this house in the night and removed it only yesterday, in broad daylight. A skillful thing, and probably their tracks are well covered."

The Ratigan house was barred and shuttered on the lower floor, about the same as the Rutgers Street house. But there were broken windows above and an air of desertion and unkemptness about it that the Perrine homestead lacked.

At this hour—it was near the midsummer sunrise—there were quite a few people astir in Jefferson Street. In these poor localities in the hot weather many people sleep at night upon the roofs, or even on the stone sidewalks on the west side of the streets, where the sun lies the shortest time.

Workmen and ne'er-do-wells alike were starting up from odd corners and wandering away. Here and there a hurrying figure slunk into a doorway, or a dark alley—nightbirds, these, whose calling it were better not to question.

Nobody lingered near the old shuttered house, however. On one side was another brick residence now given over to cheap tenants; on the other a taller and newer structure frowned, with stores on the street floor and tenements above—a veritable "double-decker," built before the new building law went into effect, with probably one-half of its rooms dark, or opening only into air shafts.

Nick noted that one of the stores—a tiny grocery—was already opened for trade, and he hailed its proprietor—a swarthy son of Italy—to learn what he could of the shuttered old house next door.

"Do you know the man who owns that house?" asked Nick.

"Why, suah, signor. Ratigan; he ver' fine mana, Ratigan. He keepa da ginmill, you call eet—heh?"

"Where?"

"Justa down there," and the Italian pointed to the corner store, quite in view of the spot. "He nica man—ver' nica man, Ratigan."

"What does he do in the house?" asked Nick.

"Oh! he do nothing in da house. It shut up. Noboda live in dat house, boss. No, no!"

Meanwhile Nick saw that Pop-eye was eying the fresh bread on the store counter with eager, wolfish eyes. He told the man to cut the boy as many slices of a new loaf as he could eat, and to give him a measure of milk, too. While the gamin was discussing this in a corner—he carried the provender aside much as a dog would take a bone off to gnaw—the detective continued his cross-questioning of the storekeeper. Being able to speak Italian himself, and after buying the provender, Nick managed to gain considerable information regarding the house and its owner.

The place had never been occupied since Ratigan, the saloon keeper, bought it. Occasionally there were goods stored in the house; but not for long. Ratigan was a rich man—something of a power in politics along with the others on the East Side. He could afford to let the old house lie idle, and there were so many repairs to be made on the place if ever it was used as a tenement that it would not pay to put it to that service.

Concerning the recent movements of people about the house the Italian storekeeper had considerable to say. He had seen a lot of goods put into the place more than a month before. Oh, no! he did not know what sort of goods. They were all wrapped up in burlap, or were in barrels and boxes. Yes, the same—or apparently the same—stuff was brought out by Tony Polaro."

"Did Tony Polaro deliver the goods at the house?" asked Nick.

To this the storekeeper replied "No." The truckmen who delivered the goods a month before were strangers to him. He had never seen either the men or the trucks before, and he did not remember whether there was even a name painted on the trucks.

As this concluded all the information the storekeeper had, and other people were now coming into the shop, Nick thanked him, and, seeing that Pop-eye had finished his repast, they went away.

"Take me to Tony's cellar," the detective commanded, and the gamin, evidently gaining confidence in his new friend every minute, started off with alacrity.

He certainly was a tatterdemalion figure as he trotted along the walk ahead of the detective. The detective could not look at the lad without smiling; and yet there was some feeling that made his eyes sting, too, as he beheld Pop-eye's fluttering rags.

On the East Side the main thought of every soul is business! Stores are kept open until the last possible chance to sell anything is gone in the evening, and they are open again in the morning to catch the early customer, too.

Before they reached Cherry Street Nick saw a clothing store, the Hebrew proprietor of which was already hanging suits out upon the awning frame, while his wife swept the sidewalk. It was the work of but a few moments to halt at this store and delight the proprietor by buying a pretty complete outfit for Pop-eye, including undergarments, shoes, stockings, and a hat.

The boy's eyes bulged again dangerously, but Nick refused to allow him to put the garments on until he had been to the public bath near by and had a scrub. In an hour the detective's new protégé was in every particular but that of his eyes, a different-looking boy.

His thin face actually took on a flush of excitement, and the grin with which he favored Nick was less sly and sullen than before.

"Ar-r, chee!" he observed. "De fellers won't know me. I don't know meself. I guess dis is one o' dem nightmares yer hears about. I'll wake up on dat pile of straw round on Rutgers Street. Ar-r, chee!"

These activities were not exactly in the nature of delay, for when they arrived at the stand of the expressman, Tony Polaro, the Italian was only then ready for business. Tony was an intelligent fellow, who had been in the country for some years and spoke English without any trouble.

"You moved some goods in your truck from Mr. Ratigan's house on Jefferson Street yesterday," said Nick, going straight at the matter. "Here is my card; I am a detective. There is something about that matter that I am investigating, and, of course, I expect you to give me all the information in your power, Mr. Polaro."

"Mr. Ratigan had nothing to do with that stuff, boss," declared the truckman, eying Nick curiously. "He only owns the building."

"Of course; this investigation of mine has nothing to do with the owner of the building, as long as he is not the owner of the goods. Who hired you to move them?"

"I don't know the gent's name, boss."

"But you know him?"

"I never saw him before the time he came and hired me."

"Did you take the goods to the house a month ago?"

"Sure not! I never saw the man till day before yesterday."

"And where did you cart the goods?"

"Why——" Polaro looked vaguely around, as though searching for somebody. He had two wagons standing by the curb, and there were three young Italians hanging about, his helpers, besides a woman in a gay petticoat and bandanna, who was evidently Mrs. Polaro and presided over the coal and wood business carried on in the basement of the building.

"Where's Angelo?" cried Polaro suddenly.

Nobody seemed to know where Angelo was. The Italians chattered among themselves. Angelo had gone—possibly—a dozen different ways, and on a dozen different errands. He was an elusive Angelo.

Polaro turned sadly to Nick, shaking his head. "I not know where Angelo is," he declared. "Angelo drove the truck yesterday."

"You were not with your men, then?"

"I was there to help load the goods, boss. But Angelo took the address and he drove the wagon. Yes! I never asked him where. Somewhere over on the West Side——"

"Who took the money?" demanded Nick sharply.

"I did, boss. Oh, they paid me first. Sure. It is a business custom here."

"And you let your wagon go without knowing its destination?"

"Oh, Angelo look out for heem," declared Polaro.

"Trusty Angelo!" murmured Nick sarcastically. "Now tell me, Polaro, who was the man who hired and paid you?"

"I don't know him. He was a small man——"

"In a brown suit, with long black hair?" finished Nick, as the Italian hesitated.

Polaro was caught before he could make up any fake description, if he so intended.

"Yes, yes, boss! That was him."

"And you have no idea where the goods were taken?"

"No, boss."

"Only one of your trucks was used?"

"That's all, boss; but it went twice," added Polaro hastily.

Nick knew that the man was not telling all the truth; but he understood enough of the dialect the bystanders spoke to be sure that there was such a person as Angelo, and that he was not present. He believed, however, that Polaro would not be above trying to hide the facts in the case, now beginning to suspect that the people he had worked for to have been crooks.

He had a second well-defined suspicion, too. He believed that Signor Polaro would hotfoot it to Signor Ratigan's saloon and put the owner of the old house on Jefferson Street wise to the fact that an inquiry was being made regarding the goods which had been supposedly stored for a month in Ratigan's house.

For Nick Carter believed now that the boxes and barrels that had been taken into the Jefferson Street house a month before had been practically empty. These receptacles had been stored there until the Perrine house behind it could be looted and the stolen stuff packed in the Ratigan house, and thence removed.

Had he been justified in doing this, Nick would have gone to the nearest station and asked for Polaro's arrest and detention until he had finished his inquiry. But he did not wish—and it was Mr. Samuel Perrine's expressed desire—to let the police into the case at present.

Nick did, however, decide upon a sudden change in his programme, and the moment he left Polaro's place, with young Pop-eye at his heels, he put his new idea into execution. He went to a public telephone and, calling up his house, got Patsy Garvan to the phone and set him to work on the saloon keeper, Ratigan. He likewise gave instructions for Chick to go to headquarters and get busy at once on the murder of the strange man in the Chinese restaurant of Nam Wing.

CHAPTER VIII.

POP-EYE MAKES A DISCOVERY.

"Now, son," said Nick Carter to his youthful protégé, "we'll go to breakfast."

Pop-eye, who still scarcely recognized himself in his new togs, rolled his eyes in wonder and demanded:

"Chee! d'youse eat so often?"

"I didn't eat, you'll remember," returned Nick. "If you have filled up on bread and milk——"

"Don't youse worry, boss," interrupted the gamin. "I never was filled up yet. I reckon I couldn't be filled up. Once I got to go to a Thanksgivin' dinner give by de Salvation Army. A guy give me a ticket. They had lots ter eat, an' they give me a basket ter take away stuff in, 'cause I told 'em me mudder an' de odder kids couldn't come——"

"Then you have some family?" queried Nick.

"Naw! dat was a steer," said Pop-eye frankly. "I eat till they hollers that there's another crowd comin' in and they wanted the tables cleared. So I stuffed all I could reach into me basket and took a sneak. But some big fellers wot didn't git inter the game caught me with me swag an' swiped de hull t'ing. I didn't feel like I'd et ha'f a dinner, anyway." And the urchin sighed at the remembrance.

"Well, if you don't break me you shall have a good feed," laughed the detective. "Here is a decent-looking eating place. Let us try it."

"Chee! it's swell," declared Pop-eye, who was used to looking only at the outside of such places.

Now that he was clean and well dressed, in spite of his eyes, he was not such a queer-looking boy. His table manners were sadly lacking; he belonged to the Great and Honorable Army of Sword Swallowers; but Nick could not help warming toward the gamin when he saw how earnestly and wolfishly he attacked the hearty meal that was set before him.

"Take your time, son," the detective advised. "Don't lean quite into the plate, and never mind looking around as though you expected somebody to snatch it away from you every minute. The waiter won't do that."

"Chee! I expect I'm a holy sight in a swell joint like dis," sighed Pop-eye.

Meanwhile, Nick himself took the opportunity to glance over the matters which had so far come to his attention in connection with the robbery of the old Perrine house, and arrange them logically in his mind.

The mystery of how the thieves had got into, and out of, the house of course dwarfed every other element. But there were other points of interest, too. The little man in the brown suit and the long black hair, that Pop-eye had first told him of, and whom Polaro had likewise mentioned as having hired him to do the trucking of the stolen goods, was a prominent figure.

Nick had his suspicions, too, of the owner of the old house behind the Perrine homestead; it could scarcely be possible that Ratigan, the saloon keeper, would have let the house as a storage place without knowing something of the men who hired it. And who were those parties? The little man in the brown suit did not do all the work himself. Nick had made sure of that from the first.

There had been several heavy articles stolen from the collection of curios in the Perrine house, besides the seven Egyptian mummies—articles that one man could not possibly have moved alone. And there was another thing that seemed to point to the fact that there had been a gang at work in the robbery.

In some way, the man shot in the Chinese restaurant by a member—or members—of the Red Necks had been connected with this robbery. The little jade god Patsy had discovered in his pocket could be accounted for in no other reasonable manner. Had the Red Necks "pulled off" this robbery of the Perrine house on Rutgers Street? It was not the kind of a thing that such a party of toughs would be likely to go in for. And, was the man with the greasy hair and the brown suit one of the Red Necks?

"The police should be able to assist me in that inquiry," thought Nick. "They will know pretty well every man classified as a 'Red Neck,' that is sure. The tracing of the Italian's truck with the stolen goods is merely a matter of time. We shall arrive at that all right!

"And the identity of the real robbers must appear without much difficulty. The thing that bothers me most—the puzzling circumstance around which revolves the whole matter—is how the goods were transferred from the Perrine house to the Jefferson Street storage place—and that without the police being the wiser. That's the point. There is the heart of the mystery. I declare! I am going back to that house and have another look over it," determined the detective.

By this time Pop-eye had begun to show signs of weariness. He rested, as it were, "on his arms," holding his knife and fork suspended, and glanced sharply at his benefactor.

"Say, boss," he said, "have you sure enough got a job for me?"

"I fancy I may make you useful later in the day."

"Well," sighed the gamin, "I better knock off now, then. This certainly has been 'the big eats'; and if I goes much furder I'll be doped so that I won't be able to dodge an ortermobile. Anyway, there's another feed comin' to me, ain't there?" he added slyly.

"I can promise you at least one square meal more out of the twenty dollars Mr. Perrine invested in you," declared Nick gravely, but with twinkling eyes. "Now, if you think you can call it off for the present we will go."

From the restaurant the detective and his protégé went directly to the house in Rutgers Street. The streets were alive with the usual morning traffic now, and when the couple arrived at the Perrine house there were plenty of people about. Nick, however, scrutiized the neighborhood, and the loiterers, carefully as he approached, and descended, with Pop-eye, into the area.

Suddenly the detective saw a long neck craned from the open door of the flat house directly opposite. He had but a glimpse of the owner of that astonishingly storklike neck, but he knew him.

"Ah!" muttered Nick; "the Buzzard is evidently interested in the house—possibly in my going into it. Very well; I fancy that lieutenant at headquarters will know how to put his hand on the Buzzard's shoulder when he is wanted. Another link in the chain connecting the robbery of this house with the murder last night."

He, meanwhile, unlocked the doors and entered, with the boy. The Buzzard had disappeared, and Nick gave small thought to him for the time being. He lit the lamp and gave it to Pop-eye to carry while they went upstairs.

The gamin's astonishing eyes missed nothing as they went along, and when they came into the back parlor of the house, on the first floor, Nick feared that the eyes would actually fall out of his head!

"Chee! It's a robbery," declared Pop-eye.

"You've hit it right the first time, son," said Nick. "Put the lamp down there on the table and look about you. If you find anything that you think I ought to see, tell me."

Thus adjured, the gamin became instantly silent. But he moved rapidly about the room, picking up things and laying them down again, turning over papers, scratching like a dog among the litter.

Meanwhile, Nick went directly to the closet door with the broken latch. The latch certainly puzzled him a whole lot, and, somehow, the detective believed it had vitally to do with the mysterious entrance and exit of the burglars who had looted the house.

The staff of the latch had been cut on the inner side of the door. Surely that had not been done idly; there was a purpose in it. But, as Perrine had asked, how had the man who cut the latch come to be shut into the closet?

Suddenly Nick felt a tug at his sleeve. He glanced down to see Pop-eye with a bottle and a smutty newspaper in his hand.

"Well, son, what have you found?" asked the detective, wondering how keen the perceptions of the youngster really were.

"They had booze here," declared the boy, grinning and holding up the bottle, which was a quart-size whisky bottle.

"How do you know? Maybe that was an old bottle that happened to be here."

"De label's new; and it tells where it comes from," declared Pop-eye.

Nick's own eyes had told him as much already. The label was fresh, and there was a second strip of printed paper under the regular label, with the name and address of the store where the whisky had been bought. And this name and address did not surprise the detective very much, either!

"And what about the newspaper?" Nick queried, without commenting further on the bottle.

"It shows dat the robbery was pulled off after the date on de poiper—see?" exclaimed the gamin.

"And what was the paper used for?" demanded Nick, with an approving nod.

"Huh? I dunno. It's all greasy."

"Smell of it. Ham. That was wrapped around a bundle of ham sandwiches. The burglars brought their lunch with them," said the detective.

"Chee! dat's so," murmured Pop-eye, who had evidently been puzzled by the grease on the paper. "Say, mister! wot's that in yer hand?"

Nick gave him the broken latch and showed him how it had been found in the closet door, with the door tightly shut.

"It was cut through on the inside of the closet, you see. Now what do you make of that?" added Nick, curious to learn how the apparently inexplicable mystery would strike the urchin.

Pop-eye took the question as seriously as need be; and he saw the point at once, too.

"Chee! how did them fellers git in de house, boss?"

"That is the problem. All the doors and windows were locked and barred, saving the one by which we entered."

"An' dey didn't git in by that one," exclaimed Pop-eye instantly. "Not at night, anyway."

"Are you sure?"

"Ain't I been sleepin' down by dat door ev'ry night since before dat paper was printed? They wouldn't ha' got by me, boss," declared the boy confidently.

"I fancy you are right," admitted Nick. "What then?"

"Troo de roof?" suggested the lad.

"No. The hatch cannot be opened."

"Then they come in this way!" cried the lad, eagerly pointing to the narrow closet, and his eyes rolling.

"Indeed!" chuckled Nick.

"Dere's a secret passage in dat wall. I read about one oncet, an' dere was a guy come up troo de secret way and killed another guy while he was sleepin' in bed—an' dey never knowed who done it. It was bully!" declared Pop-eye.

"You evidently are familiar with the classics, son," said Nick, smiling. "Go ahead and find the secret passage here. The chimney is big enough to contain a couple of them, I admit."

Pop-eye went into the closet and began to kick against the wooden partitions. The sound did not suggest any hollow space behind the sheathing, but the boy did not know that, and was not, therefore, hampered by such knowledge.

He kicked the hardest against the partition at the end of the closet toward the fireplace.

"Dat's where it is, boss," he said, with assurance. "Dere ain't room for it the other way. I bet it goes right down into the ground and under the cellar wall, and—— Say! d'ye s'pose them things Tony Polaro took out of old man Ratigan's house on Jefferson Street was what de crooks took from here?"

"I have that belief," said Nick. "But I see no signs of a passage in this chimney, Pop-eye."

"Why, of course dere is!" cried the gamin. "It was so in de book I read. An' I bet it leads right into dat house of Ratigan's. Like enough dem fellers dug it jest so's to swipe de stuff in dis ranch. Was dere much taken?"

"Quite a good bit," said Nick, watching the panting boy kick at the partition. "Aren't you afraid you'll spoil those new shoes?"

"Chee! I forgot 'em!" declared Pop-eye. "Here, boss! you try it. Youse is heavier dan me an' can bust it better. Dem crooks had a way to fasten it when dey got troo. That's a pipe."

"But I do not really believe——"

Nick's laughing rejoinder was quenched by the sudden splintering of some of the narrow boards of the partition. Pop-eye backed out, ran for the lamp, and in a moment illuminated the closet.

"Dere yer got it, boss," he said, in the most matter-of-fact tone. "You kin wrench dem boards out now, can't yer?"

Nick found himself too amazed for utterance at first. He could see that there was actually an open space behind the broken partition of the closet!

CHAPTER IX.

PATSY PICKS UP A FEW CRUMBS.

At about this hour Patsy Garvan, Nick Carter's assistant, but a much different-looking Patsy from the young gentleman who had taken his friends into Nam Wing's restaurant the evening previous, was approaching the corner of Jefferson Street, on which the garish saloon of the man Ratigan was located.

Patsy knew the locality very well, and he knew all about Tom Ratigan, as he was called by friend and foe alike. He was one of the stand-bys at election time for his party, and his place was notoriously the headquarters for "repeaters" and that class of immature crooks that now infest the East Side.

Ratigan was not the generally accepted idea of the ward politician—at least, not in appearance. He was a little, lean man, with the long, shaven Irish lip, keen blue eyes, and a dark complexion. In his youth he had been known as "Nigger Ratigan" because of his face; but grown rich and powerful, this nickname was mostly forgotten. But he had never been able, powerful politically as he was, to get a certain photograph of "Nigger" Ratigan out of a very famous gallery of such photographs at No. 300 Mulberry Street!

The rich saloon keeper had served time—and for a serious offense. He was known to have been a bad man in a quarrel. He gathered around him now men who lived by their wits more than by the sweat of their brows. If Nick had suspected the owner of the old house on Jefferson Street must know something about the stolen treasures of the late Marcus Perrine, Patsy had even greater confidence in that fact, for he knew the man.

Nick had given Patsy a hasty sketch of the affair, so far as he had investigated it at the time, and the young man made his plans accordingly. He had not come downtown in his ordinary dress, as has been intimated; when he pushed open the saloon door and sidled in the man behind the bar saw a smiling, dark-skinned "son of sunny Italy," with a bolster cover well filled with lemons slung over his shoulder, some of the citrus in his hands, and big gold hoops in his ears.

"No buy-a da lem'!" shouted the bull-necked young fellow behind the bar, mopping up the beer stains briskly on the polished wood. "Got plenty on hand now."

"Che-eap?" whined Patsy, in the most insinuating tone ever an Italian or Greek could call up.

"Oh, you can't sell 'em cheap t' me," declared the barkeeper. "I kin buy 'em for a cent apiece."

"Ten cent-a dozen!" cried the lemon seller promptly. "See! nice-a lemons."

"Aw, we gotta 'nough," returned the man; but just then Ratigan himself came in from the rear room. He was smoking a black cigar and he looked over its glowing point at the lemon seller.

"How many you got on hand, Bob?" he asked shortly of the barkeeper.

"A couple of dozen, boss."

"Buy some," said Ratigan, and turned on his heel again without a second glance at Patsy.

Evidently somewhat puzzled, the barkeeper obeyed. Patsy took as much time as he could in counting out the fruit. He knew that the proprietor of the saloon was inside with somebody else, for he heard voices. By and by he saw, out of the tail of his eye, an Italian looking at him from the doorway; he was a stranger to Patsy.

"Cheese it!" muttered young Garvan, "am I an object of suspicion the instant I hit this joint? Are they onto me? Don't I look the part, or has something slipped? Is my hat on straight, I wonder, or don't my belt meet at the back? I feel like a sweet girl graduate appearing for the first time on the public platform."

With this running comment of chaff in his mind, Nick Carter's assistant went steadily about his business, however. As he took his money and turned to go out, the Italian standing in the door of the back room said to him in what should have been his mother tongue:

"Where do you come from?"

But Patsy was not so easily caught. His Italian was fluent, and his mind was clear, too. He answered just as a man shortly over from the old country would, and told his questioner the name of the province in Sicily from which he was supposed to hail.

"No. Where do you live now?" queried the other.

"Tomkins Street," said Patsy, willing to stop and chatter if he was given a show.

But the man seemed satisfied and turned his back to him. Patsy heard him say to Ratigan within:

"I was mistaken."

The free lunch was being spread on the side bar by the Italian porter and lunchman, and Patsy, setting down his heavy bag of lemons, went to the lunch counter. It was easy to get into conversation with the lunchman, and Patsy was sure he aroused no suspicion in his mind.

Meanwhile, nothing escaped his restless eyes, and he scrutinized closely everybody who entered the saloon. Trade was brisk, and there was usually several men before the long bar. Finally Ratigan himself had to come out and assist the young man until the second barman appeared. When Ratigan went behind the bar, the Italian with whom he had been talking in the back room went away, after giving Patsy another sharp glance.

Patsy recognized several of the loungers as members of the Red Necks and other rough gangs. He could not remain over fifteen minutes in the saloon without arousing suspicion—or buying another drink, which was as bad—so he began finally to heave the bag of lemons on his shoulder again.

He was doing this when one of the swinging doors was pushed inward, and there appeared for a moment the bird-of-prey head and long neck of Buzzard Aisle. He nodded to several of the men in sight, but he marched to the end of the bar and spoke only to Ratigan himself.

Patsy was mighty anxious to know what the Buzzard wanted of the saloon keeper, but he dared not linger. He hobbled out and tried to sell his lemons in near-by stores until the Buzzard appeared again.

This was not for some minutes, and when the stool pigeon of the Red Necks came out of the Ratigan place, Patsy saw that he was just putting away into an inner pocket something that looked much like a letter.

"He brought some report to Ratigan and has been sent back with a letter, or else is bound with the letter to somebody 'higher up' than Ratigan. I wish I could follow him," thought Patsy.

But to do that would have been to bring instant suspicion upon himself. In his present character Patsy could not easily trail anybody. He used his knowledge of Italian to learn everything possible about Ratigan, and the old house farther up the block which he owned, and about the people who had recently stored goods in it. It did not take Patsy long to learn that Polaro had deliberately lied to Nick Carter when he said that only one of his trucks had been engaged in carting the goods from the storehouse.

Both a two-horse and a one-horse wagon had removed the goods. The smaller wagon Tony Polaro had driven himself, and it had gone off first, the afternoon previous, starting as though bound for uptown and the West Side. The man who drove the other truck was named Angelo; Patsy found that he had carted two loads of goods during the afternoon down to the Joy Line pier, near the Brooklyn Bridge.

These crumbs of information the young fellow spent his entire forenoon in picking up. He had one other duty to perform before reporting to Nick Carter. He had been told to get acquainted, if possible, with Tony Polaro, and learn if he were really crooked, or merely favored Ratigan for political reasons.

By the time Patsy got over into Cherry Street, in the neighborhood of Tony's cellar, his lemons were about sold out. He made a point to offer them in every little store as he came along the block, so that it would seem quite natural for him to stop at the trucking stand and try to sell the fruit to the Italians standing there.

"Go down and see Signora Polaro," advised one of the fellows, a big, black-browed individual with a scar on his cheek and the air of a bandit rather than that of a quiet citizen. But you can't tell much about these Sicilians; some of the most dangerous-looking are as mild mannered and harmless as sheep!

Patsy did not observe the woman anywhere about, but he heard a shrill voice from the cellar, so he ventured down. Coming as he did out of the sunlight into the semi-darkness of the basement, he could not see clearly for a minute. But a voice called to him in Italian to come ahead.

Patsy stumbled on into the back of the cellar, and suddenly saw a kitchen before him, lighted by a rear window. In it was a stove, and a woman was stooping over it, frying something in a pan. She turned, lifted her hand, and suddenly a brilliant light flashed over the young man's person, and he stopped, blinded by the blaze.

She had uncovered a gaslight which, until then, had been hooded. Patsy was uncertain whether to remain or go back. He became aware, after a moment, that a man stood to one side of him, and the woman had disappeared.

"That is the fellow I saw in Signor Ratigan's place," said the man sharply, in his mother tongue. "I had my suspicions."

Patsy identified the voice of the man who had spoken to him a couple of hours before in the saloon on Jefferson Street. The surprise did not hold Patsy inactive, however. He felt that he was "in wrong," and he did not stop for any argument.

Not knowing what lay before him, Nick Carter's young assistant stooped suddenly and turned to flee by the way he had come. Whatever these people were, he did not want to mix up with them as bad as all this! Besides, the odds were too great.

He escaped a swinging blow the man—Tony Polaro himself—aimed at him; but as he charged for the street steps again, he plunged headfirst into the arms of the husky-looking fellow who had sent him into the basement!

Patsy was as quick as a cat, and he could land a heavy blow; but he was, after all, a lightweight. Had he had half a chance he might have held his own with the big fellow; but at the start the man obtained such a hold as he could not break.

"Have you got him?" cried Polaro, hastening forward.

"He is as a child in my arms," declared the big fellow proudly.

Patsy let out a yell, kicked backward and caught Polaro on the shin, and butted the big fellow so shrewdly again that even he grunted.

"Hold! This will tame him," hissed Tony Polaro. "He must not cry out like that. He will bring the police about our ears."

Those words were the last Patsy heard. The big man suddenly flung him to one side, bent his body strongly, and a fearful blow landed on the side of Patsy's skull!

The young man sank down to his knees; his captor let him go, and he rolled over on the cellar floor. The blackjack had done its work.

CHAPTER X.

"THE GREASY-HAIRED MAN."

Chickering Carter had been sent by Nick to police headquarters for further information regarding the murder in the Chinese restaurant. The coroner had the case, and, up to the hour Chick got to Mulberry Street, no information regarding the identity of the murdered man had been given out to the newspapers.

The lieutenant in the detective bureau, who had chanced to stumble upon the murder almost as soon as it had been committed, remembered Chick—was, indeed, glad to see him. He had the matter of the investigation for his department in charge and expected to be credited for any arrests that might be made in the case.

"We are pretty sure who did the fellow dirt," said the lieutenant; "but what he was croaked for will have to be explained later. And just who he is is still puzzling us.

"All we know about him so far is that he has not been hanging about these corners for long. Perhaps two months altogether. He seemed to be rather decent, though he drank heavily. Then he got in with the Red Necks, and in a fight with a member of the Yakey Yakes he is supposed to have knifed a fellow. But we had nothing but suspicion against him, and he dropped out of sight after the row, anyway.

"But he seemed to be ace-high with the Red Necks, and why they should have done him in the end puzzles me."

"Sure it was them?" queried Chick.

"Buzzard Aisle is a Red Neck—and a bad one. According to your own tell, Mr. Carter, he spied out the poor devil in Nam Wing's before he was shot. Whoever did the gunwork is probably out of reach just at present; that is usually the case. But we'll nab him finally. They always drift back."

"And you say you suspect some particular member of the gang already?"

"Surest thing you know. It was the Gypsy."

"The Gypsy?" queried Chick.

"Yes. I tell you frankly, we'll have trouble nabbing him and putting him where the dogs won't bite him! He has a terrible drag up in Fourteenth Street through Tom Ratigan. They call him 'Gypsy' because he's an Egyptian, I believe. He's a nasty, foreign-looking chap, with long black hair—greasy-looking hair. He has never been caught right yet. But if I put the screws on Buzzard Aisle, as I shall, I reckon we'll get evidence enough to satisfy any judge—and it will suit the district attorney's office, anyway!"

"Have you," asked Chick quietly, "made any discovery regarding that little jade god found in the man's pocket after he was shot?"

"Aw, shucks! That doesn't amount to anything," declared the lieutenant. "He probably swiped it somewhere. They say it might be worth something handsome as a curio. But we haven't had any report of the loss of such a thing, and the fellow probably brought it with him when he came to New York."

"You haven't arrested Buzzard Aisle?"

"I'm having him shadowed. He can't get away. The Red Necks have some mighty good friends, you understand. Tom Ratigan, over on Jefferson Street, always shows up for them if they get into trouble. They're his henchmen. But when the time is ripe I'll gather in the Buzzard, and the Gypsy, too. Don't you fear. If you want to know how the case is progressing any time, just come to me," said the lieutenant perkily.

"Just so," thought Chickering Carter, as he left headquarters and strolled over toward the scene of the shooting. "If I want to know anything, ask a policeman! I guess that by the time they are ready to do anything, Nick will have the case closed up. I believe I'll do a little sleuthing myself. Odd that murder last night should dovetail right into the case that Sentimental Sammy brought to Nick's attention.

"That jade god is only a joke to the lieutenant. But it was no joke to that fellow who was shot! I believe the thing points to the reason for the trouble, and Buzzard Aisle holds the clue to the whole business. The lieutenant is taking the matter too easy. Buzzard may fool him, after all. Humph!"

Chick went first to Nam Wing's. The Chinaman had been examined at police headquarters and then allowed to go back to his restaurant. It was decided that the restaurant keeper knew nothing of the murder, saving what he had already told the officers.

But there was a point Chick remembered that the police seemed to have overlooked. The murder might be the outcome of a gang quarrel, but Danny, Nick Carter's chauffeur, had seen a Chinaman put out the lights in the restaurant entry before the murderer shot through the restaurant door.

Chick put old Nam Wing on the griddle of his questioning, and got out of him that he thought the Chinaman who had turned out the lights so as to hide the movements of the murderers was one of his own men.

"I velley sure he Mock Wing. But Mock Wing allee same gone."

"Gone where?" demanded Chick.

"He gone topside flom here. Bloston," declared Nam, who always had a plus of "l's" in his mouth when he talked, and flung them almost anywhere.

Further probing brought out the fact that Mock Wing, who was old Nam's nephew, started for parts unknown within half an hour of the murder—before Nam had got back from the police station, in fact.

"He allee same bad Chinaman," declared the worthy uncle, shaking his head. "He bad as them 'Merican felly. Glad he go."

Evidently the missing young Chinaman had guilty knowledge of the identity of the murderer, and he had been paid to get out of the way.

"Buzzard seems to be the only fellow who can be caught and squeezed," thought Chick. "That is what Nick said this morning on the phone. I must go after Buzzard."

Chick, like Patsy, was well disguised, and his loafing about the streets of the lower East Side was not likely to cause comment. And he had good fortune in his search, too. He was crossing Chatham Square when he saw the sly and furtive-looking, long-necked scoundrel coming out of a saloon side door and making swiftly off into the Cherry Hill district.

Nick Carter's first assistant followed promptly; but so successful was he in shadowing the Buzzard that he went 'way to Rutgers Street with him without the bird of prey suspecting his presence.

Chick knew that the house the Buzzard set himself to watch was the Perrine homestead, where Nick had been during the night. Nick had sent in complete information of his own personal movements when he called up his house early that morning.

The Buzzard watched the Perrine house, and Chick, from a neighboring shelter, watched the Buzzard. Both of them saw Nick Carter and the boy, Pop-eye, come into the street and enter the locked house by the basement door.

Chick would have been glad to speak with Nick then; but he dared not show himself. He did not know what the Buzzard would do—what move he would make next.

Evidently the fellow had been sent to watch the robbed premises and report if anybody went there. The fact that Perrine and another man had been there during the night might have been learned by the burglars through the blotter report at the police station in the precinct. Some notice would have to be taken by the man on the desk of the fact that a policeman had gone to the house with the owner.

The burglars would know that the robbery had been discovered. Buzzard Aisle had evidently been sent to watch the place, and as soon as Nick and his young protégé had disappeared inside the house, the Buzzard hustled around into Jefferson Street and to Tom Ratigan's saloon.

The remarks of the police lieutenant had prepared Chick for the discovery that the ward politician was mixed up in the affair. Chick remained outside, and he saw and recognized Patsy in his disguise of a lemon peddler, plying his trade in the neighborhood. He feared to attract suspicion as well as attention if he gave his comrade "the high sign."

As well as Patsy, Chick observed the Buzzard come out of the saloon with the letter. That letter immediately became the object of Chick's strongest desire!

Ratigan had evidently trusted something to writing—something that might make good evidence if used aright by the final prosecutors of the men who had robbed the Perrine house—and perhaps it would tell against the murderer of the unknown man in the Pell Street restaurant, too.

"I'll have that letter—and the man to whom it is sent—as sure as I'm a foot high!" determined Chick; and he kept doggedly on the Buzzard's trail.

This was not so hard a matter, for the fellow did not seem to fear pursuit, and he went uptown by the public conveyances of a cross-town car and then by a Fourth Avenue surface car. He surely would not recognize Chick in his rough disguise.

At the Grand Central Station the Buzzard hopped out, and Chick managed to follow him without being noticed. The young detective understood—or believed he did—the reason for this quick trip uptown. Somebody whom Ratigan believed should know about the recent developments in the case was going away by train, and the Buzzard was to deliver the letter to him.

Fortunately for Chick, on the steps of the station, as he entered, stood two plain-clothes men whom he knew. One of them had already spotted Buzzard Aisle, and was staring after him curiously.

"What's that gun doing up here, Harry?" he muttered to his side partner. "He's out of his baliwick—— Hello, Chick!" as a figure gripped his arm and mentioned a name.

"I can tell you all about Buzzard Aisle being up here, John," said Chick, smiling. "But I'll postpone the explanation for a minute till we see what he does. Follow me in here, will you, boys?"

"What's doing?" asked the second detective briskly.

"I want the Buzzard held. He will, I believe, try to hand a letter to somebody who is going away on a train. One of you fellows take Buzzard and the other grab the person—man or woman—to whom he speaks or tries to pass the letter."

"And what will you be doing, Chick?" demanded John.

"The letter for mine! I want it—I want it bad, old man. That letter is of considerable moment, I believe, to my chief, and I propose that no harm shall come to it—that it shall not be destroyed—until I can put it into Nick's hands."

"Go ahead! there's your man," whispered John, as the trio came into the great station.

The Buzzard seemed hesitating in the middle of the floor, staring all about him. Finally he began to walk up and down between the aisles of seats. There was the general bustle of passengers, with the booming of the train announcer's voice sounding now and then over all.

People were continually coming in, sitting down, or leaving the rows of seats for the train shed as the various trains were called. The Buzzard walked up and down for some minutes before he seemed to attract the attention of a small, plainly dressed, veiled woman who sat by herself, and without even a hand bag, on one settee.

She stared after the roughly dressed East Side tough, and, when he turned to face her again, she dropped her handkerchief and, in stooping to recover it, Chick was sure that she made some sign with her hand near the floor.

Instantly the Buzzard went over and sat down beside her. He did not look at the veiled woman—he even turned his back to her—and she showed no interest in him.

Both were quite unsuspicious of the three detectives hovering near. The Buzzard moved uneasily on his seat; after a moment his hand stole into his pocket and out again. He hid something under his leg and slid along the seat a little closer to the veiled woman.

His motions were all natural enough, and the incident would have attracted no attention unless one were on the lookout for communication between the tough and the veiled woman.

Suddenly a woman screamed, and there followed an uproar in the station that brought a dozen guards and policemen on the run. It was not the veiled woman who had screamed. She was fighting like a tigress with one of the plain-clothes men who had seized her, and held her despite her struggles; the Buzzard had been literally "snatched" over the back of the seat by the other headquarters man, while Chick Carter stood between them with the soiled note in his hand, which he had seized at the very moment it was finding its way into the woman's fingers!

"Send for the wagon, John, and hold them both. No bail, remember, until you hear from Nick Carter. There is a big robbery in this, and perhaps a capital crime," declared Chick.

"I'll have to handcuff this cat!" gasped the plain-clothes man, who was struggling with the woman.

Some of the foolish bystanders began to cry "Shame!" forgetting that an angry woman is worse to hold than a man. Chick deliberately walked up to the veiled person and snatched both the veil and hat from her head. At once the "her" became a "him"!

"By thunder! it's the Gypsy!" cried John, in amazement.

He settled with the greasy-haired man in just a minute, then; and he was not too tender with him.

"It's a big thing. Take the best of care of them both!" cried Chick, as he hurried away.

CHAPTER XI.

BALED UP.

Patsy Garvan first felt the sensation of being heaved about as though the ship were laboring heavily in a cross sea. Then he remembered that he was not at sea.

At least, when he last had his senses he was on land—to wit, in a cellar on Cherry Street, in the hands of several Italians who seemed to bear him no love at all!

He was half smothered, and he realized that he was strapped about with cords, or bands, that made moving his limbs next to impossible. In addition, he was gagged with a particularly unpleasant-tasting rag, and there seemed to be similar rags packing him closely all about. He had to catch his breath through a screen of these rags!

Being unable to cry out for help or to struggle, he tried to use his half-fuddled wits in working out an explanation of his present position.

The heaving of this bundle that he lay in had ceased; but it was in motion, and there was a muffled rumbling sound that, at first, Patsy could not understand.

There were other sounds, too—shouts, the rattling of metal, and a seeming bustle of voices. He finally decided that he was in the public street; and this discovery led him to believe that he was being carted through it, hidden in this great bundle of rags!

What had happened to him after being struck by the blackjack in the hands of Tony Polaro, the truckman, was easily figured out, when he had gotten thus far in his analysis of the situation.

Naturally the Italians would not dare keep him in durance in the coal and wood cellar. And, as their suspicions of his disguise were of course proven when they examined him, they would expect him to be searched for by the police.

"Their idea would be," thought the hazy Patsy, "to get me out of the way at once. Lucky they didn't consider it necessary to 'do' for me completely! And, perhaps, they believe me dead.

"How could they get me out of the cellar—and in broad daylight—without being seen? Not with a load of coal or wood, that's sure! Ah! there was a junkshop next door."

He remembered that fact clearly. The basement of the house next to Tony Polaro's was used by a junkman. He had noticed men and women sorting rags when he was trying to sell lemons to the Italians by Tony's truck.

There may have been an opening in the basements between the two houses. Tony probably did the trucking for the junkman. The rags, after being sorted, are roughly baled up and sent to the mills, and Patsy made a shrewd guess that his senseless body had been made the nucleus of one of these bales of rags!

Aside from the unpleasantness of the situation—in the heart of the filthy rags—there was the uncertainty of the destination in store for him. He could not move a finger. He could not attract the attention of the people in the street.

Quite probably his bale was one of several on Tony's truck, and what the Italian would do with him finally was a serious thought in Patsy's troubled mind!

They rumbled on, and of course Patsy could not judge where the truck was going. He realized that the heaving of this bale upon the wagon had aroused him; from that point quite ten minutes elapsed before the truck stopped.

By its manœuvrings, he believed the wagon must be backing up to the curb. Then the guy ropes were loosed and the bales were taken down. His own particular bundle was shifted with great care; Patsy heard voices, but could distinguish nothing that was said.

Then the bale was heaved up again—evidently in the arms of several men, and it was carried up some steps and finally plumped down upon a floor.

Where he had been brought Nick Carter's assistant could not imagine. After a while the steps of the men receded, a door closed with a bang, and silence ensued.

He might be in a warehouse. Patsy knew of no mill where rags were used in this quarter of the town. But, no matter where he had been brought, unless he were discovered and released within a reasonable length of time, Patsy Garvan realized that he would be in a bad way.

Used as he was to peril, and to face many forms of danger, this situation could not fail to trouble the young fellow mightily.

How would Nick, or any of his other friends, learn what had become of him—in time to rescue him alive? The thought was agonizing, and when he allowed his mind to linger upon Adelina, and her despair, young Garvan was quite beside himself.

He tried to struggle out of his bonds; but they had been tied too well. The foul rag in his mouth made his jaws ache painfully, and he could not relieve himself of it. Fortunately he managed still to breathe through the rags packed about his face.

The Italians had perhaps not cared whether he breathed or not. They may have believed him dead already. By the time his body was found and identified, Tony Polaro and his friends might all be scattered—perhaps returned to Italy.

These and numbers of other fearful imaginings raced through Patsy's feverish brain. He actually grew light-headed, and he began to people the silent place, where he had been left with living, horrible creatures.

He heard them moving about, and distinguished—so he believed—their whispering voices. They seemed to be moving the bale in which he was confined, and he struggled to shriek aloud, but could make no sound but a hollow groaning.

Suddenly he heard spoken words distinctly. They were these:

"You are right, I believe, boy! That was a human voice. There is somebody here."

Patsy's heart leaped within him. He could not struggle; he seemed to be almost at his last gasp; but he managed to utter another groan.

"Here it is, boss!" cried a second voice. "Say! dis beats dat story I read in de yeller paper. It's bully! I reckon they tied a guy up in dis bundle, and he's goin' to croak."

Suddenly Patsy felt the fastenings of the bale in which he was confined loosened. The rags seemed to spread apart and he could breathe more deeply. He once more heard a man's voice say:

"Pop-eye, your ears are as good as your eyes. And your imagination is better than either!"

In another moment the rags were entirely torn away from Patsy's face, and as the bale fell apart, his trussed-up body rolled out upon the floor!

"Give me that bit of candle, Pop-eye!" exclaimed a voice that Patsy easily recognized as his chief's, and the next moment he found himself glaring up into the face of Nick Carter, revealed to him by the flickering light of a tallow candle.

CHAPTER XII.

POP-EYE AND ROMANCE.

The fact that there was a secret passage in the great chimney of the Perrine house, on Rutgers Street, and that by it the burglars must have entered and made their exit, was so obvious that Nick Carter had not believed it! It took an imaginative boy, with his head full of a nonsensical story that he had read, to prove the fact against every physical argument that it was not so.

Nick had sounded the walls of the closet with the broken latch, and they had not seemed hollow to him. And there was good reason for that, as he found when Pop-eye had burst in the end partition. This partition was double, the boards being about three inches apart, and the space between was stuffed full of cotton waste!

Naturally this padding dulled the sound, and made it appear, even to Nick's skillful ear, that the wall was solid.

It meant nothing to his little protégé, however. Pop-eye had gotten the idea into his head that there was a passage, and he kept at the thing until he revealed the aperture to Nick.

In half an hour the detective had ripped out the partition—which had been screwed into place—and a shaft more than two feet square in the chimney was revealed.

Into the bricks forming the wall on one side of this shaft were set iron rods for steps. By these steps it was easy to descend into the depths, and, once having discovered the probable route the burglars had taken in coming and going, Nick and his little comrade were not long in exploring the passage.

The shaft descended below the flooring of the cellar of the house—below its foundations, in fact. There was a wider passage, a brick culvert, in fact, leading from the base of the shaft back under the cellar and yard of the Perrine Street house and under the yard of the house behind it on Jefferson Street.

This culvert had evidently been constructed some years before, yet it had not been built when the house was erected. In the two yards—the property had all belonged to the Perrine family for upward of a hundred years—were two enormous cesspools, evidently constructed when the houses were built, for at that time there were no sewers in the neighborhood. When the city had grown, and sewers had been laid in the streets, the cesspools had been disconnected, but had never been filled in.

At some later date the culvert between them, and connecting the two houses, had been constructed—probably by Mr. Marcus A. Perrine, the eccentric uncle of the present executor of the estate.

Probably the passage was blocked up at the Jefferson Street house; but somebody had chanced to discover the entrance after the house had been sold by Samuel Perrine. Nick Carter found this exit to be in the cellar of Ratigan's house, behind a heap of boxes and other rubbish. A single flat stone covered the mouth of the passage at that end.

Nick and Pop-eye had come into the Ratigan house about the time that Patsy Garvan was feeling himself in a very bad case indeed. Baled up in the rags, he could not help himself, and might even have been suffocated had not the street gamin that Sentimental Sammy and the detective had befriended, heard the young man groan.

Nick had his young friend and assistant unlashed, and the gag removed, in short order. But he certainly was too surprised to express himself coherently for a few moments.

When, however, he had heard Patsy's story, the mystery of young Garvan's presence here, as well as some other matters, were plain to the detective.

"Ratigan may claim that he knows nothing about this robbery, or the uses to which his house has been put. But Tony Polaro cannot explain *his* guilt away. away.

"They are evidently in the habit of using this old house, with Ratigan's permission, as a storage place. Sometimes for legitimate goods like these bales of rags; sometimes for stolen goods. Perhaps the rags were brought here merely as a blind for the police, anyway. If suspicion was raised regarding this house, these bales would look innocent enough."

"But not the one I was in, Nick," gasped Patsy.

"No. I fancy that would not have been left here long. A single bale taken out of here would not have attracted suspicion. And what they would have done with you and the bale is a mystery that, thank Heaven! we haven't to solve—thanks to Pop-eye's sharp ears. He's a born detective, he believes, Patsy. What do you think?"

"I owe the kid a good turn, at any rate," declared Garvan. "But he'll drop those eyes of his out if he doesn't mind."

"Ar-r, chee!" muttered Pop-eye, who did not fancy being guyed.

When Patsy had somewhat recovered himself, Nick and his two companions baled up the rags again, putting into the centre of the bale sufficient wood and litter from the cellar to make up for the loss of Patsy's weight and bulk. They tried to make the bale look as it had before Nick cut it open to rescue his assistant.

Then they made their way through the passage back to the Rutgers Street house.

"This will be news to Mr. Perrine—this passage," said Nick. "I am sure he had no idea that there was such a mystery connected with his uncle's property. The discovery, however, does not close the case, by any means. Unless Chick has been very successful in following other threads of the web, we have a lot of work to do yet.

"The stolen goods must be recovered. Your discovery that the greater part of the loot has been shipped to Boston on the Joy steamer that left last evening by the outside route helps some. We will get the stuff, and probably the party to whom it was consigned, very easily.

"Tony Polaro must be arrested, not only for his assault upon you, Patsy, but because he has knowledge of the destination of a part of the stolen curios, too.

"Ratigan is to be counted with, and the man whom Pop-eye has connected with the robbery by inference, at least.

"There is much to be learned regarding the murder of the man in Chinatown last night, too; that has a close thread of connection with this robbery, I am sure. If you feel equal to going, Patsy, we'll get out and set the regular police at work, now, rounding up the various people we shall want to interview."

"Oh, I can travel," declared young Garvan. "But for the love of Mike, let me go home and get a bath! I've the smell and taste of those vile rags with me yet."

"I'll let you off, Patsy. Pop-eye and I will finish this case," chuckled Nick Carter. "And I fancy that a good bit of the glory of solving the mystery belongs to him, anyway. We'll have to cultivate that imagination of his; it surely has led to good results in the case."

When Patsy separated from them Nick instructed his very youthful assistant to return to Cherry Street and watch the movements of Tony Polaro and his friends. Nick did not wish to order their arrest until he was sure such a move would not make the members of the gang that had cleaned out the Perrine house flee.

Over the telephone he reported his discoveries to Mr. Samuel Perrine at his office.

"And you can put against the twenty dollars you gave me to spend on Pop-eye the credit of his discovery of the way the burglars managed to rob the old house," said Nick, after explaining to the soap manufacturer the present status of the case. "I consider it big interest on a small investment, sir."

"You are right, Mr. Carter—you are right," cried the millionaire. "I'll certainly do more for that boy if he is deserving. But the discovery you made in those two old houses of my uncle's amazes me, sir. I never heard of the passage. I don't know why he should have built it, saving because of his general eccentricity. I believe the house I sold to Ratigan remained unoccupied for twenty years before Uncle Marcus died; so the tunnel must have been built before that time. And you really have hopes of recovering the things stolen?"

"Including the Egyptian mummies," said Nick, laughing. "I know where the bulk of the things went and we will get them. There evidently was some division of the spoil, however, and I have yet to trace one wagon load."

This matter proved to be easier than Nick expected. When he got over to police headquarters, notice had just come in of the arrest of the disguised man known to the police as Gypsy, and of Buzzard Aisle.

The lieutenant in charge of the investigation of the Chinatown murder already knew where Gypsy lived. It was in a flat on the West Side, and in that flat

Nick later found a generous number of the more valuable articles stolen from the collection of the late Marcus A. Perrine.

The seven mummies were likewise found in this flat, each cased up in an innocent-looking pine box. The Egyptian, if he was such, evidently had a special fondness for the dried remains of his possible ancestors!

Gypsy had been about to take a train to Boston, where he was to meet and dispose of the remainder of the collection shipped via the steamboat the evening before. He was evidently the head and front of the robbery committed at the Rutgers Street house, and had associated with him certain members of the Red Necks, whom he had paid well in cash for their assistance.

These facts were drawn out of the Buzzard when he was put through the "third degree" in the office of the head of the detective bureau. Further, it was established beyond a doubt that Gypsy had shot the unknown man in the Chinatown restaurant. The Buzzard was made to divulge the following statement of fact:

Who the dead man really was, he did not know. He thought he was an American who had known Gypsy in the West or South. He had not been in New York—at least, in the New York underworld that Buzzard knew—for long.

He was Gypsy's lieutenant in the robbery of the Rutgers Street house. He it was who had found all about the habits of Mr. Samuel Perrine, when he went to the Rutgers Street house, and about his contemplated trip to Cincinnati, and when he would return.

He and Gypsy quarreled frequently. He seemed dissatisfied with the cash payment Gypsy had made for his work, and had declared that he wanted a share of the curios.

It was supposed that he had obtained some of the more valuable smaller articles stolen from the Perrine collection, too. At least, on the night of his murder Gypsy had gathered the Red Necks and set them on the trail of his one-time friend.

He had been chased out of a Bowery saloon and had taken refuge in the Pell Street restaurant of Nam Wing. The Buzzard had suspected it, had followed him, and brought the gang to the restaurant door.

Gypsy had shot his friend to death with his own hand. As Nick Carter had said, the five shots came from a single gun.

Then the whole crowd had escaped through the back courts, and Nick would certainly have never connected the burglary of the Perrine house with this murder had it not been for the little jade god found in the dead man's pocket.

On one point Nick and his assistants found their evidence insufficient to bring every guilty person to book. The letter Chick had so shrewdly secured, just as the Buzzard was passing it to the disguised Gypsy in the Grand Central Station, was a letter warning the murderer that the police were already on his trail.

But it was impossible to connect Tom Ratigan, the ward politician and the owner of the Jefferson Street house, with the writing of the letter. The saloon keeper expressed great anger that his premises had been used by the thieves, and denied any guilty knowledge of the business. It is hard to catch a man like Ratigan, anyway.

Tony Polaro and the big fellow, Angelo, were both arrested, and Nick presented sufficient evidence against them to the district attorney to have them both held for trial in connection with the robbery, to say nothing of their murderous assault on Patsy Garvan.

The police had promised Buzzard Aisle immunity if he turned State's evidence, and he was held to testify against Gypsy, who, when the case was presented to the grand jury, had a true bill found against him for murder in the first degree.

Meanwhile, most of the large collection of antiques and curios, gathered from all over the world by Marcus Perrine, were restored to the Rutgers Street house again, and Mr. Perrine hired a family to live in the house and guard the valuables.

Pop-eye found that there were many "square feeds" coming to him before the balance of Mr. Perrine's twenty dollars was expended; or else Nick Carter had a magic way of making the money last! In the street gamin's opinion, the great detective was the most wonderful man who ever lived, and a magician was nothing to him!

And Nick determined in his own heart that the unfortunate waif should have a better chance than he had ever dreamed of—such a chance as every American boy should have. Nick believed that there was material in Pop-eye for the making of a useful and honorable citizen.

THE END.

The next number (669) will contain "Nick Carter's Sudden Peril; or, The Riddle of the Rutgers Street House."

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A SAILOR'S GALLANTRY.

The yachts *Wrenton* and *Flying Fish* were to race. The former vessel, a beautifully modeled craft, painted white from stem to stern, with the exception of a clearly defined red stripe, which greatly added to her beauty, was the property of Harry Clifton—a gallant young seaman, as brave and noble as he was courteous and well-bred. He was tall, dark-eyed, and broad-shouldered, with supple limbs and truly manly bearing.

He was engaged to one of the loveliest young women in New London. Her name was Belle Sinclair, a creature who once seen could never be forgotten. The glorious sweep of the supple, queenly form, with the sloping shoulders and white neck, was unrivaled, while the lithe, rounded waist ever seemed to invite an affectionate caress. The face was of oval shape, the brow broad and low, the hair dark, and so long that, when lowered, it hung to the wearer's feet. The eyes were of a deep, dark blue, with that peculiar dovelike expression so bewitching to a young woman, while in the voice and laugh there was a silver melody which seemed to ring gently upon one's brain long after one had heard it.

The yacht *Flying Fish* was the property of Thomas Crofton, a bluff, honest young fellow, fond of everything pertaining to blue water, even to a crab.

There had been high betting among the sporting fraternity of the city as to the merits of the two yachts, some feeling certain that the "blue yacht," as Crofton's craft, from its color, was called, would win the race, owing to the heavier press of canvas it was capable of carrying, while others as confidently asserted that the *Wrenton,* which was of lighter and more graceful build, would prove the victor.

The day appointed for the race came round. Belle, looking bewitchingly lovely in a dark alpaca dress, a velvet sack, fitting closely to her matchless waist, and a hat with a red feather, stood upon the quarter-deck watching her lover, who was at the helm, as the vessel went booming along upon her course.

"Oh, Harry, they will beat us!" she exclaimed, her cheeks flushed and her eyes bright with excitement.

"Never fear," answered Harry, smiling.

The *Flying Fish,* however, with everything on, swept past like a great white cloud.

There was a reason besides the fact of the *Wrenton's* belonging to her lover that made Belle anxious that this craft should win. It was this, that the prize—a very large sum of money—was to be used for the benefit of several poor women in the city, whose husbands had been killed by the explosion of a boiler in a factory where they worked. Besides the natural pride of the sailor in his craft, the poor women's interests also made Harry anxious to win the prize, and he resolved to strain every muscle to this end.

The *Flying Fish* had got about half a mile ahead of the *Wrenton,* when the young man, suddenly taking advantage of what he had been waiting for—a flaw of wind, which, striking the former vessel, sent her round like a top—clapped on additional canvas, and in a few minutes went thundering past the other craft, down upon her beam ends, with the white water flying over her lee rail and roaring about her gallant bows.

"Hooray! hooray!" cheered her crew, waving their caps, while Belle clapped her hands, her cheeks glowing with a brighter red than before.

The *Flying Fish,* caught in the flaw, had lost some of her canvas, and it was several minutes before she could recover from the confusion.

By this time the *Wrenton* was dashing along far ahead, her white hull half buried in the sun-lighted waters.

Crofton, however, was a determined young fellow, not easily discouraged.

He went about shouting his orders, and assisting in their execution with the steady coolness of a true seaman, so that in a short time the *Flying Fish* was again showing her heels to the blue sea caps behind her.

For some time she gained steadily upon the other vessel, perceiving which Clifton clapped on an additional staysail, and hoisted another gaff above his mainsail, adding greatly to the vessel's speed.

"How much farther have we to go to win?" inquired Belle.

"About fifteen miles."

She heaved a sigh of disappointment.

"They may beat us then, after all."

"They shall not beat us," answered Harry determinedly.

The *Flying Fish* had set more sail. She was, in fact, so full of canvas that her hull, almost the same color as the water, could not be distinguished.

Suddenly there was a lull in the breeze that had hitherto filled the *Wrenton's* sails, while the *Flying Fish* seemed to stand along as she had hitherto done. It was plain that the breeze had not yet abated in her direction.

Harry, glancing up, perceived, however, by the appearance of the clouds, that this lull was only the prelude to a fresher gale than had yet been experienced. He was impatient for the coming of this gale, as the *Flying Fish* was rapidly hauling up to him.

She had, in fact, arrived within speaking distance before the temporary lull was felt by her.

Crofton, on his quarter-deck, lifted his cap out of respect to Belle.

"How now, Clifton?" he shouted; "think we are going to have a blow?"

"Ay, ay," answered the other, "and, if I'm not mistaken, it'll take us in a few minutes."

"So I think," pointing out a big, yellowish cloud rolling along the sky from windward.

"Why don't you take in some of your canvas?" shouted Clifton.

"I am waiting for you," answered the other, laughing.

Clifton was also amused.

"If we wait long we will both go to the bottom," said he.

"Ho! ho! ho! that's true!" laughed Crofton.

Just then a buzzing sound was heard. The whole atmosphere seemed tinted of a strangely sulphurous hue. Far and near the sea was covered with rough, misty-looking ripples, while astern the water was seen lashed white.

The two seamen hesitated no longer. Simultaneously both reduced their canvas to a jib and reefed mainsail.

The *Flying Fish* by this time had drifted close upon the *Wrenton's* stern.

"Better go below, Belle," said Clifton, as his fair companion leaned over the rail watching with interest the indications of the coming storm.

"No, if you please, Harry," said Belle. "I'm not afraid of a little blow."

"Look out for yourself, then," said Harry, "the vessel might make a sudden pitch and send you over."

"Would you stop to pick me up?" she inquired, smiling.

"How can you ask such a question?"

"I thought, perhaps, you would be too anxious to win the race," said Belle archly.

With a whiz and a rush the storm at this moment struck the two vessels, when down they went upon their beam ends with every timber quivering.

Crack! snap! whish-sh-sh! went masts and yards, seeming every second about going by the board.

Meanwhile through the agitated waters the two vessels tore along at a rapid rate, the *Wrenton* still holding her own.

Suddenly a loud crack was heard, and away went the jibboom of the latter vessel, the sail flapping about with a violence which threatened serious mischief.

"Haul down the jib!" shouted Clifton.

The men sprang to obey. The sail was hauled halfway down when one of the hoops became foul, and all efforts to dislodge it by jerking upon the halliards proved unavailing.

Meanwhile the yacht was now plunging so that it would be a perilous undertaking to crawl out upon the boom in its shattered condition, and endeavor to clear the hoops.

Knowing this, Clifton would not ask his men to undertake the hazardous duty, but resolved to venture himself.

He had not advanced three steps, however, when Belle, who had her eye upon him, caught his arm.

"Harry, you are going out upon that boom!"

"Certainly; the sail must be cleared or the whole boom will go."

"You must not go. I will not let you."

"Come, Belle, we will never win the race at this rate."

"I would not wish to win it at the price of your life," said she.

Meanwhile, a young fellow, the only son of a widowed mother, had advanced to crawl out upon the boom to prevent Clifton's going.

The captain saw him, however, and breaking away from Belle's clasp he rushed to the spot.

"No, no, Jack," said he, "it shall never be said that Harry Clifton allowed one of his men to go in peril while he stayed behind."

With these words he rushed out upon the boom followed by the eyes of the agonized Belle, who, with clasped hands and wild face, her beautiful hair streaming back upon the gale, stood watching him. Clifton, balancing himself by the stay, now endeavored to clear the sail.

He had nearly done so when a puff of wind, catching the canvas, blew it violently against him, sending him overboard into the wild waters.

A shriek from Belle, a rush to the braces and the boat.

The voice of Clifton, however, now rang out from the dark waters as he rose to the surface.

"Never mind me, my men. Keep on! Keep on and win the money for those widowed women."

"Do not heed that order!" screamed Belle; "lower, lower for him. I command you!"

"Obey my orders there aboard!" thundered Clifton. "I am a good swimmer. I will take care of myself."

"He can never keep up in such a gale," wailed Belle; "lower, men, I adjure you."

The men seemed inclined to obey her orders, but unfortunately, the braces could not be pulled by such a limited number in a gale like the present, and the *Wrenton* dashed onward, leaving Clifton far astern!

As to the boat, there were not men enough to work her and the vessel also. Should they leave the yacht, she must be destroyed, and Belle perish in her.

There seemed no alternative, now, but to obey Clifton's orders, although had the braces been hauled when he fell, at which time the vessel had accidentally shot up into the wind, she might have been brought to.

Meanwhile Clifton kept himself above the water, manfully buffeting with the waves, until the mist track hid his receding vessel from sight, when his arms ached so that he believed he must soon give up.

The *Wrenton,* keeping on, won the race.

Poor Belle, however, in a raving delirium on her lover's account, was taken home to her father's.

Boats were sent out in all directions, but no sign of Captain Clifton could be found.

The day passed and another and another. Still no news of the missing one, who, it was now confidently believed, was drowned.

On her sick bed meanwhile, poor Belle kept asking for her lover.

The silence on the faces of her auditors, however, showed her plainly that he had not yet been heard of.

The color forsook her cheeks, and although she had recovered from her delirium, her friends feared that consumption would follow.

"If I could only see his poor body," she would moan plaintively.

On the fourth day she fell back in a swoon. Her relatives gathered round after she was restored, for she looked as if she was dying. The doctor came and shook his head.

"Can nothing be done?" whispered the bereaved father.

"Nothing, unless the one she mourns for could be brought back. The sight of him might bring her to life."

"Impossible; the poor fellow is drowned."

A quick step upon the stairs, a knock at the door, which, being opened, admitted Captain Clifton.

At sight of him Belle uttered a cry of joy and held out her arms. All retired. When they returned Belle was almost herself again.

Explanations followed. The captain had been picked up by a Portland steamer bound to Savannah. Thither he was obliged to go, as no home-bound vessel was met. As soon as possible he had taken passage for home.

There is little to add.

Clifton and Belle were soon made one. They are a happy couple, for whom the widowed women who received their share of the prize money never fail to pray night and day.

A CLEVER CRAB.

On the Agala Islands in the Indian Ocean there is a very strange crab. He is known to science as the *Birgus latro,* or thief crab, and his depredations are carried on in the cocoanut groves which abound on these islands. The crab grows to be twenty-two inches long, measuring from the tip of the tail to the end of the long claw, and resembles in general appearance the hermit crab. The abdomen is fleshy and not covered with a shell, and in order to protect this it is the habit of the thief crab to take forcible possession of a shell of the Trochus family, in which it lives. It is nocturnal in its operations, and has the faculty of selecting the trees having the finest cocoanuts upon them. Climbing up the trunks frequently for twenty-five feet, it reaches the limbs and severs the stems which attach the nuts to the branches. These are frequently as thick as one's three fingers, and would require a strong knife to cut them. Having brought down the nut, the crab now descends to the ground, digs a hole and rolls the cocoanut into it. He then commences to tear off the husk, fibre by fibre, until the nut is completely exposed, and then, breaking in what is known as the eye, he eats the meat completely out. The fibres stripped off the cocoanut by this crab will frequently fill a bushel basket, and they are gathered for making mattresses, and are also twisted into ropes.

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